Strategic Initiatives
Summative Evaluation of the Community Skills Centres — British Columbia

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This was a very complex and lengthy study. It depended most heavily on the cooperation of the hundreds of respondents surveyed. These included: the key respondents representing the federal and provincial funders; respondents from province-wide stakeholder groups; the Board, management, staff and clients of the 20 Community Skills Centres (CSCs); community partners of the CSCs, including representatives of private and public sector training organizations, local business and industry, economic development agencies, and social service agencies. Without their forthright views on their experiences with the CSC initiative, this report could not have been completed.

On behalf of the evaluation research team and the Evaluation Steering Committee, we extend our deepest appreciation to all concerned.

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Executive Summary

Introduction to the Summative Evaluation

Community Skills Centres (CSCs) are a joint endeavour of the federal government (through Human Resources Development Canada, as part of its Strategic Initiative Program) and the province of British Columbia (through the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, as part of its *Skills Now* programming). The CSCs were designed to assist individuals, employers and communities in meeting their needs for innovative, flexible training to help meet their labour market adjustment needs. The CSCs were to be community-driven and community-managed. They were to add value to existing training resources, especially through the use of electronic technology. The funding period for the Strategic Initiative (SI) was five years (ending with fiscal year 1998/99), and by the end of this time the CSCs were to be independent of government funding for operational costs.

Now that the SI funding period has concluded, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), on behalf of the CSC/SI Steering Committee, has contracted the services of an evaluation research team to conduct a summative evaluation of the CSC program in British Columbia.

Terms of Reference for the Summative Evaluation

The summative evaluation is stage 3 of the evaluation of the CSCs. There was a formative evaluation in stage 1. The second stage was a series of baseline and outcome surveys with CSC training participants and a comparison group of persons on Employment Insurance and Income Assistance who had not participated in any CSC programming. The purpose of the summative evaluation is to:

- *determine the extent to which the CSC initiative is meeting its original objectives;*
- *determine the impacts and effects that CSCs have had on their main client groups;*
- *assess whether funding for CSCs is being used effectively;*
- *assess the degree to which CSCs have developed new and innovative approaches to meet community needs;*
- *assess the degree to which CSCs have promoted partnerships . . . and the degree to which federal/provincial partnerships have assisted the CSC initiative in meeting its objectives; and*
- *assess other performance data on CSC activities and operations.*

Evaluation Methodology

A combination of research methods drawing on quantitative and qualitative data was used for the summative evaluation. The basic approach was a case-study method, involving a full spectrum of interviews and program document reviews for each of the 20 CSCs in the province. Twelve of the CSCs were visited by evaluation team members. The rest were covered to the same degree, but by telephone. There was also a telephone survey of

58 employers and 122 employees who used the training services of the CSCs. Key respondents involved in the development and implementation of the CSC programming at an Initiative-wide level were interviewed as well. They included representatives from the government partners, the public and private post-secondary system, as well as labour, at senior levels. In all, 576 individuals were interviewed.

The data collection was organized around the four objectives set out for the CSC/SI implementation processes and outcome. A truncated version of these objectives and the evaluative findings for each are as follows.

Summary of Findings on Objectives Achievement

Objective 1

> *To act as a focal point for bringing together community resources to increase access to training . . . ; adding values to existing programs . . . providing an access point for labour market information . . . [and address the training needs of targeted client groups.*

Since the formative evaluation, the CSCs as a group could be seen as having made considerable progress in meeting this objective as a whole. As a group, they are very much involved in activities that address this multi-faceted objective. They have established both informal and formal means of bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in their respective communities. They are very active in establishing partnerships with other trainers, in both the private and public sectors. However, in a few communities, the various training sectors have not been able to come to a resolution of the perceived or actual potential for competition among each other for training opportunities.

The CSCs as a group definitely add value to existing programs and services. The primary means include the use of technology to address the needs of a range of target groups for self-paced, highly flexible training modes. Another means is the structure of operations of CSCs themselves, in that the facilities are open on a very broad schedule, they are "non-traditional" in terms of the learning environment, and are provided by staff that are uniformly regarded as highly skilled in dealing with consumers. The CSCs have considerably strengthened the provision of labour market information (LMI) since the formative evaluation. This partly is because there is a great deal more LMI available, in much more accessible and user-friendly formats. This achievement also reflects the fact that CSCs have been awarded contracts for delivering LMI, as both the federal and provincial governments have turned over more of this to community deliverers. More than half of the CSCs participated in the Enhanced LMI component of Strategic Initiatives as well, having received contracts for developing and/or delivering this information to their communities.

Objective 2

> *To increase community input and decision making regarding training and adjustment issues by developing CSC training plans . . . and establishing consultation . . . processes.*

The CSCs have made progress since the formative evaluation in achieving this objective, but there remains room for improvement. Boards continue to be the central conduit for eliciting community input into CSC training plans. This is a strength, but it also can be limiting if the Board is either too diverse to have the concentration of skills a given CSC needs to meet its own goals for training needs identification, development and delivery; *or* if the Board has members who feel they must put the interests of the organization they represent ahead of the interests of the CSC. No matter how well the Board or CSC as a whole may operate to develop community-based training plans, because many of the CSCs are located in economically vulnerable areas, it is difficult to plan for advancing economic change through training when the economic opportunities may be decidedly limited. The changes in federal/provincial policies and funding allocations have also changed the context in which CSCs operate and plan. There has been substantial shrinkage of direct and indirect government funding amounts since the CSC/SI was instituted.

Objective 3

> *To increase competitiveness of business and industry in the global marketplace and individuals in the labour market by providing services to encourage the use of technology* . . . [for training] . . .

The CSCs can be seen as meeting this objective to a considerable degree. Although it is asking rather too much of any one program or an individual CSC to increase "global" competitiveness of industry, the employers who have utilized CSC training services speak very highly of the value of the training for increasing the skill levels of their employee base. As well, employees and current training participants interviewed were positive about the training they received and the manner with which CSC staff interacted with them. Employees and current participants felt their skills were enhanced and reported a more positive sense of self-confidence and a stronger valuation of training as something to include in their future.

The CSCs rely most heavily on the use of computer-based technology for the training they deliver, and the range of training content is impressive. The technology is adapted to the needs of the consumer, whether employer, employee or other individual. All of these activities indicate a very pro-active and creative use by the CSCs of electronic technology to advance training in their communities.

Objective 4

> *To achieve financial independence from government funding of operational costs by generating revenue and leveraging private sector funds; creating partnerships and collaborating with the community; and administering funds responsibly.*

This objective highlights an inherent dilemma of the programming model for the CSCs, in that CSCs are to strengthen economically vulnerable communities through bridging, brokering, etc., and yet are expected to generate sufficient revenue to become financially independent. Generally, the CSCs that approach independence devote themselves

virtually entirely to the development and delivery of services on a revenue-generation basis. If they serve individuals who cannot themselves pay for service (i.e., those in IA, EI, etc.), the CSC does so as part of a contract held with a ministry/department to provide services to the client group.

Only one CSC is largely financially independent, though it continues to utilize government funds (matching funds) for subsidizing some of its revenue-generating training. Perhaps two more CSCs have the potential to become permanently independent of government funding for operational costs. Fully three-quarters of the CSCs do not anticipate that they can achieve this objective. Most feel that if approximately 30 percent of their operating costs were government funded, they could continue to operate, although on a more modest scale in some cases.

The larger context of being located in small, rural communities, many of which are resource-reliant in a time of severe downturn, also substantially constrains the ability of CSCs to generate revenue, no matter how willing or able they are to do so. The changes in government roles in relation to support of training and employment-related programming, and the uncertainties of the role of CSCs in the face of the implementation of the provincial Training Accord, also are inhibiting factors in the development of revenue-generating activities.

Thus, while few CSCs have achieved this objective, the impediments for the most part can be attributed to factors external to their individual operations.

Initiative-Wide Evaluative Conclusions: Addressing the Summative Evaluation Issues and Questions Presented in the Original Evaluation Framework

Once the data have been analyzed to assess the degree to which the individual CSCs have achieved the four objectives that shaped their implementation processes and outcomes, the evaluation analysis moves to the next level of generalization — coming to evaluative conclusions about the four core evaluation issues common to all evaluation research. These are consideration of a program's impacts and effects, objectives achievement as a whole, program rationale, and alternatives for the future based on lessons learned. We will briefly deal with the first three and then report more fully on the last, because it includes a set of options for the future.

Evaluative Conclusions on Impacts and Effects of the CSC/SI as a Program

The overall effects of the CSC/SI have been positive. They generally have created a distinctive niche in their communities and have indeed enhanced community involvement and control over training resources. The outcome for the communities has been positive and the outcome for the wide range of program users has been valuable. Human resources have been enhanced at the company and individual levels, and the CSCs are often a real source of pride and increased confidence for those who have been involved with them.

There have been strains created by the establishment of CSCs in some communities. The concerns of other training providers, in both the public and private sectors, were pronounced at the inception of the CSC/SI, but these have been considerably allayed, especially at the local level through active consultation and collaboration over the last several years. Some unease remains, but it has not been an insuperable impediment to the operations of the CSCs or their community partners.

Evaluative Conclusions on Objectives Achievements of the CSC/SI as a Program

First, looking at the achievement of the four program objectives in aggregate, we would say that for three of the four objectives (1, 2, and 3) the CSC as a program has made as much progress toward achievement as could be expected for a new, complex model such as this. The objective that has not been met for the most part is that of financial independence. However, we believe that this objective contained an inherent dilemma from the beginning. It certainly is understandable that in today's context governments would set this as an objective, so we are not criticizing them for doing so. However, this objective is unattainable at an aggregate, program-wide level because of the circumstances in which the CSCs have been placed. By circumstances we mean their location in economically vulnerable communities, as well as the "philosophical" contradiction that they are to be both a public service and a "virtual entrepreneur." These two poles of expectation are irreconcilable in the current programming model.

Evaluative Conclusions on Program Rationale

The issue addressed under program rationale is whether the program model being evaluated is an appropriate, effective and efficient means of meeting the overall program goals. In other words, given those goals, is there a strong enough rationale for continuing to use that programming approach instead of another model to meet the goals?

It seems clear that the CSCs would not be approached by the community to develop and provide the diverse training the CSCs have come to deliver, nor could the CSCs market the range of courses they generate based on their formal and informal needs identification, unless the *previously unmet* need was out there. Therefore, in our view, there is a definite need for the type of training the CSCs facilitate — a need for the *means* or *processes* the CSC employs and for the diversity of *content* they offer.

Furthermore, we believe that the CSCs' operations are very efficient. They rely heavily on (unpaid) needs identification, networking and governance from their volunteer boards. They may have a staff of 2 or 18, but they are generally economical in their approach to human resource management and to facility use. Most staff are on contracts, the facilities are not luxurious, and overhead is carefully monitored.

Given these evaluative findings, there is considerable justification for a CSC-type model. The recommendations provided to the Evaluation Steering Committee address the issue of directions for future programming.

1. *Introduction and Terms of Reference for the Summative Evaluation*

The idea for what became the Community Skills Centres of British Columbia arose out of a 1993 Premier's Summit with Business and Industry. At this Summit, business and industry stated that the currently available publicly funded training resources were not meeting their needs. In particular, their needs were not being well met for "just-in-time" training, provided in a highly flexible manner, and geared to the needs of communities whose employers and workers were facing dramatic economic downturn.

The provincial government, through the (then) Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, began to develop a model of a community-managed training resource that would broker access to training that would meet these needs. An integral part of this Community Skills Centre (CSC) concept was that the CSCs would facilitate substantial use of electronic technologies for training and that they would become financially independent of government funding for operational costs.

The original thinking on the location of these Centres was that they would be placed in smaller communities, with a priority given to those that were especially economically stressed. Over time, this approach was modified, with consideration given to placing CSCs in a few urban centres where they could serve target groups in particular need of these specialized training opportunities.

The province incorporated the CSC concept into its *Skills Now* programming, which is described in its informational materials as " . . . a $200 million comprehensive plan to prepare British Columbia's workforce for the 21st Century . . . Economic and technological changes demand a significant change in how we train and upgrade our workforce."

Having said that the CSC model was developed explicitly to help communities meet their training needs for the future, it should be noted that though this was the "manifest" goal of the model, there was a "latent" goal at what could be seen as a "political" level. That is, early in the development of the model, a senior official in one of the provincial partner ministries stated to a meeting of college executives that the program being developed should also be seen as a "wake-up call" for the colleges in terms of the need identified by business and industry for more responsive training resources.[1] This should be kept in mind because this is a part of the developmental history of the CSCs. Also, the role of the CSCs and their relationship to other training providers — public and private/non-profit sectors — is one of the important evaluative issues that frames the evaluation research.

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[1] The account of this occurrence and the statement made was reported to the evaluators by several senior government respondents as well as other government and CSC respondents interviewed, so we are taking it as an accurate description of this additional, if more implicit or latent goal for the CSCs. It does not, of course, contradict or replace the actuality or validity of the manifest goal for establishing the CSCs.

To return to the CSC model itself, as it was being developed, the federal government announced the Strategic Initiatives Program in the budget of February 22, 1994. The Initiative allocated a total of $800 million for fiscal years 1994/95 through 1998/99 for joint federal-provincial-territorial ventures. These were designed to:

> *. . . experiment with new and emerging ideas about social security which will improve job opportunities for Canadians and enable those facing serious labour market problems to overcome barriers to successful adjustment, while also reducing their dependence on the social security system. These pilot projects will contribute . . . to the process of social security reform which is now under way in Canada, at both federal and provincial/territorial levels.*[2]

Because the CSC concept fit within this framework, the province entered into partnership with the federal government to implement the CSCs across British Columbia, with funding support provided through the Strategic Initiative (SI). Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) is the federal department involved and the (now) Ministry for Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT) is the lead provincial partner.

Now that the Strategic Initiative funding has reached the end of its term, HRDC, on behalf of the CSC/SI Steering Committee, contracted the services of an evaluation research team to conduct a summative evaluation of the CSC program in British Columbia.

Terms of Reference for the Summative Evaluation

The summative evaluation of the CSCs must be seen as the capstone of a three-stage evaluation process. A formative evaluation of the programming was conducted in the last half of 1996. As a formative evaluation, it examined the implementation process, assessing how well the programming was progressing at that time, and exploring its impacts and effects at that time. Conclusions and recommendations focused on identifying program strengths and suggesting modifications to enhance programming for the remainder of its five-year delivery.[3]

The second stage of the evaluation process was a series of surveys, designed to assess the impacts of programming on CSC participants, with a focus on those who were on either Employment Insurance (EI) or Income Assistance (IA). The methodology was based on a quasi-experimental model, in that one set of surveys (baseline and follow-up) was of CSC participants (including EI and IA recipients) and the other set was conducted with a comparison group of non-participants (EI and IA only). Thus, the issue of *incrementality* — of whether the CSC experience in and of itself can be shown to have had positive

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2 From "Northwest Territories Investing in People, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, Strategic Initiatives," Program Evaluation Branch, HRDC, May, 1995.

3 The evaluation firm for the formative evaluation was CS/RESORS Consulting, Ltd., one of the two partners in the joint venture team conducting the summative evaluation.

impacts that otherwise are unlikely to have occurred — could be addressed in a systematic fashion, drawing on quantitative data and statistical analysis.[4]

Finally, the summative evaluation looks back on the CSC/SI as a whole, not only assessing success, but also drawing lessons for how the governmental partners and communities may improve labour market adjustment programming in the future. The Request for Proposals listed the following research objectives which the evaluation was to achieve:

- *determine the extent to which the CSC initiative is meeting its original objectives.*
- *determine the impacts and effects that CSCs have had on their main client groups . . .*
- *assess whether funding for CSCs is being used effectively.*
- *assess the degree to which CSCs have developed new and innovative approaches to meet community needs.*
- *assess the degree to which CSCs have promoted partnerships . . . and the degree to which federal/provincial partnerships have assisted the CSC initiative in meeting its objectives.*
- *assess other performance data on CSC activities and operations.*

In the Methodology section that follows, we will describe how these objectives were addressed.

The Request for Proposals also set out the requirements for the main organizational features of the evaluation report. It is divided into two volumes: 1) a summary of the evaluative findings and 2) a technical report. The former contains a synthesis of findings on what the CSCs did to achieve their own objectives and the evaluator's assessment of the degree to which they did so. It also addresses each of the core Initiative-wide evaluation issues and evaluation questions set out in the original evaluation framework prepared for the Design Report in the early stages of the research.

The technical report contains a series of sub-reports on the descriptive findings that form the basis of the evaluative conclusions. These reports include: descriptive grids of each of the 20 CSCs, including summaries of the perspectives of respondents on factors that contributed to or impeded objectives achievement; overview of findings from the employer/employee surveys; overview of findings from the focus groups with current participants in CSC programming; a brief "meta-analysis" of selected data from the Stage 2 evaluation research — the baseline and comparison group surveys; copies of data collection instruments; a list of key respondents; and a copy of the original evaluation framework chart.

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4 The firm conducting these surveys was Malatest and Associates.

2. *The Summative Evaluation Methodology*

There is a saying in research circles that "the question determines the method." In a summative evaluation there are two essential questions to be answered. The first is: How well did the specific program do what it was intended to do? The second is: What can be learned for future programming addressing the same overall goals (whether or not the evaluated program itself were to be the vehicle for program delivery)?

At the risk of lapsing into pedantry, we suggest that the reader may find it useful to consider this selection from one of the standard evaluation methodology texts:

> *The summative versus formative distinction was originally made . . . to call attention to different evaluation* ***purposes****. Summative evaluations are done for the purpose of making judgements about the basic worth of a program. Formative evaluations are aimed at program improvement. Summative evaluations* ***tend*** *to focus on outcomes (though not necessarily to the exclusion of evaluating implementation), and formative evaluations* ***tend*** *to focus on program processes (though not necessarily to the exclusion of measuring outcomes).*[5]

In the case of the summative evaluation of the Community Skills Centres (CSCs), we will be making judgements about the basic value of the program in order to contribute to decision making about optimal programming in future. In order to do this, we must examine both the effectiveness of the implementation process *and* its outcome.

No matter what the eventual methodology selected, it must be one that allows for a comprehensive, balanced research approach to the program at hand. In the case of a complex, constantly evolving program such as the CSC/SI, this calls for the use of "triangulation" as a guiding principle.[6] Integral to this is the use of multiple lines of evidence, with the researchers using the appropriate data sources, data collection strategies, and analytical techniques.

The overall research methodology addressed both process and outcome elements of the Initiative. For evaluation of the degree to which the implementation *process* was successfully accomplished, the methodology of choice relied most heavily on a case-study approach. This entailed a comprehensive program of interviews with a full range of respondents. Respondents included: Board members, management and staff; local representatives of the relevant federal and provincial governments; community partners, such as community economic development officers, or business associations; employers

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5 From Michael Patton, *Practical Evaluation*, Sage Publications, 1982:48. We note that Patton also points out that the concepts of outcome or process are not clearly delimited, and that one person's outcome may be another person's process, and vice versa.

6 Denzin, N.K., *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, 1978, as quoted in *Patton, M.Q., Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, Sage Publications, 1980, p.187.

using CSC services; representatives from public and private sector training organizations; and available current participants in programming.

The case studies involved on-site visits of several days duration with 12 of the CSCs and a telephone-based, parallel data collection program for the remaining 8 CSCs. These interviews were largely open-ended and hence the data were mostly qualitative. Program documents were collected for each site, including the previous and current business plans, program user statistics, and materials the CSC produced to describe its programming for the community.

The immense amount of qualitative data collected is particularly useful for describing and assessing the effectiveness of the programming process. That is, what was the nature of their participation in programming, and what are people's perception of what works for them, of what should be retained or changed. The interviewer has a carefully worked-out interview guide, but in this data collection process the respondent has the opportunity to pursue topics of particular interest at some length, to bring in new topics that may not even have been considered and to tell the researcher about unanticipated impacts of programming.

It must be remembered that though these respondents spoke very much to process issues, to how well the implementation worked out, they also could — and did — give their views on the various aspects of the outcome of CSC programming.

To focus on *outcome* issues, there were two complementary research strategies, both reliant mainly on the collection and analysis of quantitative data. This kind of data is particularly appropriate for the measurement of outcomes such as impacts on employment rates, occupational and income mobility, and rating of the satisfaction with programming.

One of the strategies was a telephone survey of employers and employees who had made use of the CSC services. These 58 employers and 127 employees were selected by us from the complete lists of both provided for us by nine CSCs chosen to meet criteria of location, size, etc. The questionnaires had both fixed-choice and open-ended questions. The open-ended, qualitative responses were analyzed in a quasi-statistical manner, so that we could ensure that our reporting accurately distinguished between "majority" and "minority" opinions. Again, these respondents could and did discuss the process of program delivery as well as its outcome for them, because the process of program delivery often was an important issue for them in terms of choosing to use CSC services.

The other source of outcome-specific data was the surveys conducted in the second stage of the evaluation — the baseline CSC and comparison group data collection. The findings from this study have been delivered as a stand-alone report, but for the summative evaluation the evaluation team was given the edited database and some additional analyzes were carried out to supplement the assessment of outcome.

There were also interviews with key respondents at what is called the "Initiative-wide level." These were open-ended interviews with senior management at federal and

provincial headquarters, as well as with representatives from stakeholder groups, such as the associations of public and private trainers and labour. These respondents addressed to both process and outcome issues and commented on the issue of what has been learned that could be applied to future programming. (A list of these key respondents is found in Volume 2.)

It may be useful to the reader to have in chart form a summary of the data sources and collection strategies, as they relate to the evaluative emphasis that each serves (i.e., process of implementation, outcome, and lessons learned for the future).

Evaluative Emphasis	Primary Data Source(s) and Data Collection Strategies	Data Type
Program Implementation Process — Achievements and Impediments	***Interviews*** • Manager/staff: 94 • Board: 94 • Community partners (if also, on Board counted as Board only.) Respondents in each site always include local college and school district representatives): 80 • Local HRDC/MAETT: 38	Qualitative, with some numeric (program usage, financial)
	Document review Operational overview, training plans, etc.	Qualitative, with some numeric (program usage, financial)
	Initiative-wide key respondents • HRDC and MAETT (senior management): 7 • Respondents from associations representing public and private training colleges and institutions (management and staff): 3 • Respondents from labour organizations: 1 ***Total Program Implementation Respondents: 317***	Qualitative
Program Outcome	• ***Respondents listed above*** • ***Employer/employee surveys, by telephone*** Employers : 58 Employees: 122	Qualitative Quantitative (including those qualitative data that could be quantified)
	• ***"Meta" analysis of baseline and follow-up surveys of CSC participants (169) and comparison group (280)***	Quantitative
	• ***Current participant focus groups: 74 respondents (at 9 CSCs)***	Qualitative
	Total Program Outcome Respondents: 254	
Lessons Learned for Future Programming	• ***Evaluation analysis of all relevant research data***. *Most respondents were asked specifically about lessons learned and directions for the future.*	Quantitative and Qualitative

In sum, the views and experiences of 571 individuals were elicited, in a systematic, carefully documented manner. The respondents reflect the full range of participants in the CSC/SI — clients, program deliverers, planners and policy makers, and other stakeholders. A very large amount of program documentation was collected and reviewed. The method described above has yielded the comprehensive, balanced information that is essential to the completion of the summative evaluation of the CSC/SI in British Columbia.

A Note About Possible Limitations of the Methodology

While this methodology provides comprehensive coverage of the CSCs, documenting the experiences and perspectives of those who have been involved in a wider range of CSC programming and processes, it should be noted that the scope of the study did not allow for coverage of those who were *not* involved with the CSC/SI.

That is, we talked with hundreds of individuals who had used services, and to community partners who had been involved in some way with their local CSC. We were not necessarily talking only to the "converted" or to those who had found the interaction with the CSC positive. In fact, respondents were systematically asked about the breadth of their experience, to identify any problematic issues or experiences, and to suggest means of improving the CSC operations. Whether they were or were not satisfied with their involvement, we were in either case able to document their experience. But we did not study those employers who may have decided not to use the services, those individual community members who were not familiar with the CSCs or who may have decided not to utilize services, or those community agencies or organizations that had not interacted in any way with the CSCs — by choice or by happenstance. However, we emphasize that all employers/employees were selected by the evaluators — not the CSC staff — from much larger and complete lists provided by the CSCs. In the case of community partner respondents, again, the final choice was ours, with the selection made from a larger list of categories of respondent groups that we provided to the CSCs to fill in. If, for any reason, we identified other respondents who we felt would have a perspective necessary to our evaluation, we contacted them, whether or not they had been listed in any way by the CSC.

It is important for us to note that we are aware that the data collection from those who used the CSC services or had otherwise been engaged with them (even if their contact was seen by them as unsatisfactory) rather than those who had no relationship with the CSCs could be seen as a limitation to the data or to the findings. But in practice we do not believe that this is so. Because of the numbers and breadth of roles of those interviewed, the amount of documents reviewed, and the open-ended and balanced content of the data collection instruments, we believe that we have been able to capture the reality of the implementation and outcome of the CSC/SI across the province.

It would be another, much larger undertaking to sample these other data sources, contact them, interview them, etc. The return on such an effort would likely be very modest in any case, because of what would probably be a relatively low level of information of direct relevance to the CSC/SI at a local or provincial level.

With this background on the methodology and scope of the evaluation research kept firmly in mind, we turn to the presentation of evaluative findings.

3. *Summary of Evaluative Findings*

Because of the complexity of the Community Skills Centres/Strategic Initiatives (CSC/SI) and because the report in full consists of two volumes, it is necessary to explain first the organizational structure of this Summary section.

3.1 Organization of the Summary of Evaluative Findings: Topics and Rationale

The purpose of Volume 1 is to highlight the most important findings about the implementation and outcome of the CSC/SI and to provide the evaluation team's assessment of the degree to which the objectives of the Initiative were met. The analysis and reporting happens on two levels. One is the analysis of objectives achievement of each CSC, though we must deal with them in aggregate for reporting here. This is presented in segment B of this Summary section. The other, subsequent analysis level is of the Initiative as a whole, and how well it meets its overall policy goals. From that level of analysis and assessment we will form our overall evaluative conclusions at the Initiative-wide level. This will be covered in Section 4, the Evaluative Conclusions at the Initiative-wide level. That Section will be organized in terms of the evaluative issues and questions derived from the evaluation framework that was finalized in the Design Report at the beginning of the research process.

In this Summary Section we will begin with a program description, to ensure that the reader has an overview of the structure and programming of the CSCs at this time. Then we will turn to the four objectives that each CSC was to meet, and assess the degree to which they have achieved them. These objectives were provided to the evaluators as part of the background material for the formative evaluation and they served as the organizing principle for the research program, as they have for the summative evaluation.

CSC Objectives

First objective:

> *To act as a focal point for bringing together community resources to increase access to training and to bridge between training and work by providing access to new training opportunities; adding values to existing programs and services; providing an access point for labour market information and programs and services that addresses the training needs of targeted client groups.*

Second objective:

> *To increase community input and decision making regarding training and adjustment issues by developing CSC training plans; assessing community environment; and establishing consultation and decision-making processes.*

Third objective:

To increase competitiveness of business and industry in the global marketplace and individuals in the labour market by providing services to encourage the use of technology; participating in inter-connected province-wide network of training services; and building on and collaborating with existing technology services, groups and individuals in local communities.

Fourth objective:

To achieve financial independence from government funding of operational costs by generating revenue and leveraging private sector funds; creating partnerships and collaborating with the community; and administering funds responsibly.

For analytical purposes, it is clear that three of these four objectives are focused on *processes* that were to be established and maintained as the CSCs were implemented across the province. These three are Objectives 1, 2 and 4. Each describes processes that CSCs were to adopt as they were being established in the first place and that they were to maintain over the years of the Initiative. For all of these objectives, the evaluation asks, "Was this process implemented, and how well did it succeed?"

The third objective, that of increasing competitiveness of business and industry in the global marketplace, and of individuals in the labour market, especially through the use of technology, is the more outcome-focused of the objectives. Not only is it possible for respondents at all levels to comment on the effectiveness of CSCs in doing so, but there are also three research components that explicitly assess outcome, two of them relying largely on quantitative data. These are the employer/employee surveys, the "meta-analysis" of the baseline and comparison group surveys conducted in the second stage of the total evaluation process, and the focus groups held with current participants. When we reach the discussion of that objective, we will present the results of the analysis of outcome in relation to enhanced competitiveness, as well as some comment on the processes that led to these outcomes.

There are *aspects* of the process objectives that can be treated as outcome-focused, of course.[7] The whole implementation of the CSC Initiative is an outcome, in terms of the policy goal of establishing this model of programming. If a CSC adds value to existing training, that is an outcome. But the CSCs were to be a model of community management, of community involvement in planning and implementation. This is a process in itself, and thus, objectives 1, 2 and 4 can be seen as process-focused, while objective 3 is outcome-focused. Having set out the organizational plan and rationale for it, we turn to the Summary of the evaluative findings themselves.

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7 See footnote 5 where the point is made that there is not necessarily a clear distinction between process and outcome. It is a matter of emphasis on certain elements of the data, depending on the questions and issues being addressed, and the ultimate purpose of the evaluation research.

3.2 Summary of Evaluative Findings: Program Description and Objectives Achievement

In order to set the context of the evaluative findings, we will begin with a brief description of the CSCs as a group at the time of the evaluation field research (autumn of 1998 — early winter 1999).

3.2.1 Description of the CSCs Across British Columbia — An Overview

See the following charts and commentary.

Note: The information below is based on a combination of documents and interviews, collected several months prior to the writing of the report. The human resources situation for CSCs is a very flexible and shifting reality, so the numbers given below should be seen as general guidelines to staffing, but may well not be completely accurate at the time of this report. Also, "staff" is an imprecise term, in that the CSCs often utilize a number of methods for meeting human resource needs. There are salaried, full-time staff paid out of core funding, full-time or part-time "staff" attached to a contract with a given funder, or funded through a partnership(s), or under a specific project fund. There are also individuals who work full or part-time at the CSC delivering training services, but who are completely funded by their own employer (i.e., the School District, which may supply a teacher to oversee an Adult Based Education (ABE) computer-based learning lab).

The projects listed are not exhaustive, but are regarded by respondents as particularly significant or important — for their content, or financial value, or as exemplary of partnerships they have formed. At the end of this multi-page chart is a more complete (but also not exhaustive) list of training programming, organized by the main categories of training used in reporting for the SI funders. There are also frequent shifts in programming, as needs are met or newly identified, partnerships formed or dissolved, contracts undertaken or completed. So the listing below should also be seen as relatively but not completely current or comprehensive.

CSC (Community)	Current Staff	High Profile Projects	Partners	Clients Served
Alberni-Clayoquot (Port Alberni) • Opened June 1995	Manager Administration/support 4 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor Tofino: Administration	• ABE (with PLATO) at CSC • Tofino Centre with variety of computer training courses (College shares location) • Ucluelet (CSC manages computer lab) • Golf course work experience program with related training • Work Keys pilot project • Wireless Link project to coast with on-line training and Internet access	• local College and School District • local College • West Coast Career Centre • West Coast Sustainability Association • MacMillan Bloedel • First Nations and others	• adults seeking upgrade or College preparation • clients in Tofino • clients in Ucluelet • unemployed fishers • forest workers • Aboriginal learners on the West Coast
Burnaby • Opened — not relevant; operated previously as a Workplace Training Centre under OLA	Manager Administration/support 3 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• Enhanced outreach and training services (counselling and computer skills training) • Career Transition Centre (technical supports, resource library, access to counselling and case manager support) • Burnaby Youth Connection Project — providing job exploration and job search skills	• Burnaby Family Life • School District in response to community need • RCMP and Chamber of Commerce	• clients with disabilities • unemployed in need of LMI, job search supports, computers • youth

CSC (Community)	Current Staff	High Profile Projects	Partners	Clients Served
Cariboo Chilcotin (Williams Lake) • Opened June 1995	Manager Administration/support 5 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor Plus: 2 teachers (paid by School District)	• ABE (PLATO based); Grade 11 and 12 in adult learning environment (with full time teachers at CSC)	• School District	• mainly forest workers
		• Matching Fund ($20,000) to support capacity building activities for local organizations	• CSC funded	• local non-profit organizations
		• Matching Fund ($20,000) to support outreach training programs to rural populations	• CSC funded	• clients in small outlying communities
		• Partners in Employment — job marketer handling disabled clients and youth	• ESP Consulting	• unemployed disabled persons
		• ILINC pilot — online classroom concept through the Internet	• College of New Caledonia	• clients seeking a college course, but able to leave home
		• Delivered computer/business skill training to remote communities	• Local schools and local economic development organization	• ranchers and tourism operators
Kimberley • Opened June 1995	Manager Administration/support 4 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor Plus: Auxiliary instructors	• ABE • Distance learning — PC Tech repair course	• College of Rockies • Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT)	• adult learners • clients interested in work in PC repair field
Kitimat • Opened Feb 1995	Manager Administration/support 1 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• Basic Skills Upgrading • Satellite-based training project	• School District • SAIT	• workers at Eurocan and Alcan • local industry workers and EI clients

CSC (Community)	Current Staff	High Profile Projects	Partners	Clients Served
Masset • Started Aug 1996 Opened Apr 1997	Manager Administration/support 1 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• One-stop-shop for client needs (CFDC, employment services, etc.) at CSC • Ecotourism and forestry training on an outreach basis (beyond Masset)	• CFDC and HRDC (EAS contract) • NWCommunity College	• EI clients • persons interested in ecotourism and forestry careers or skill upgrades
Mission • Opened May 1996	Manager All other staff	• Certified testing centre for various computer courses (e.g., MS System Engineer) • The Ozone — a career resource centre with job finding skills upgrades, career counselling	• private training centre • response to community need	• persons pursuing careers or upgrades in high tech field • EI and IA clients
Morice (Houston) • Opened May 1995	Manager Administration/support 3 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• Workplace Technology 2000 program-office administration program • Value-added wood program (with certificate) • One-stop-shop for client services • Technology training via satellite (e.g., engineering)	• NWCommunity College • Abbotsford Value-Added Centre and local mill • HRDC and MAETT on contract • SAIT	• unemployed office workers need technology upgrade • value-added mill workers • EI and IA clients • employed workers needing a skill upgrade (e.g., engineering field)

CSC (Community)	Current Staff	High Profile Projects	Partners	Clients Served
New Westminster • Opened Oct 1995	Manager Administration/support 7 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• Trade Fair/Career Fair	• Douglas College and School District	• high school and college students, IA and EI clients
		• One-stop location for employment-related client services (co-located with School District)	• School District	• IA and EI clients
		• Community Enterprise Facilitation Society	• Douglas College, City, and business community	• not serve clients — supports community economic development
		• One-Start Access — system of 10 computers in the community linked to CSC web for LMI	• HRDC	• unemployed job seekers, street entrenched youth
		• Community grant program to support activities to help young people to not become delinquent	• Douglas College	• at-risk youth

CSC (Community)	Current Staff	High Profile Projects	Partners	Clients Served
North Cariboo (Quesnel) • Opened June 1995	Manager Administration/support 5 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• ABE (PLATO) and Dogwood at CSC	• School District	• unemployed and employed clients seeking upgrade or Dogwood
		• ABE using a computer lab and PLATO in a First Nations Community	• School District and College of New Caledonia	• First Nations seeking upgrade or Dogwood
		• Work-site computer training lab (PLATO and Power Engineering) with tutor from CSC	• Local industry, School District, SAIT	• pulp workers at a local company
		• Certified computer courses with Internet based testing	• VUE — a centre for computer training certification	• forest workers, EI clients
		• Career Counselling Network — six sites with career counselling, aptitude/ interest assessment, LMI	• Private, public and non-profit providers	• underemployed and unemployed clients
		• Career Resource Centre — independent job search supports, career counselling	• HRDC on contract	• EI and IA job seekers
North Coast (Prince Rupert) • Opened June 1995	Manager Administration/support 7 Instructor/facilitator/	• ABE at CSC (with PLATO and tutors)	• School District	• EI and First Nations clients
		• Distance learning for some specialized technology college courses	• SAIT	• EI clients and those wanting to upgrade computer skills
		• Career Resource Centre	• HRDC	• EI and IA job seekers

CSC (Community)	Current Staff	High Profile Projects	Partners	Clients Served
North Island & Region (Port Hardy) • Opened June 1996	Manager Administration/support 4 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• Integrated adult learning centre — Port McNeil and Port Alice (co-located with college) • Gwa'Sala Nakwaxda'xw Training Centre	• North Island College and School District • First Nations Band	• EI and IA clients • First Nations
North Thompson (Clearwater) • Opened Sep 1997	Manager Administration/support Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• Adult learning centre through co-location of CSC and College and sharing of resources • ABE • One-stop-shop for client employment services — career counselling, skills assessment, LMI	• University College of Cariboo • School District • Clearwater Employment Services, Community Futures Outreach and MAETT contractor	• persons needing skills upgrades • adults needing upgrade or GED • EI and IA job seekers
Peace (Dawson Creek) • Opened Feb 1995	Manager Administration/support 2 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor Plus Tutors for MS Certified Engineer Program	• Self-directed computer training • Retail workshops • Work Keys • Outreach computer based training labs in Tumbler Ridge and Fort St. John	• School District • Chamber of Commerce and Community Futures • Local forest company • Local business	• unemployed persons and those needing to upgrade computer skills • retail sector employees • forest workers • retail and business sector employees

CSC (Community)	Current Staff	High Profile Projects	Partners	Clients Served
Prince George • Opened — not relevant; operated previously as a Workplace Training Centre under OLA	Manager Administration/support 3 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor 6	• ABE at CSC	• School District	• EI needing an education upgrade or Dogwood
		• Career Transition Centre — career counselling, job search resources, website dedicated to job search and LMI	• HRDC	• EI and IA job seekers
		• MS/Novel Technician Certificate program	• local college	• unemployed and employed persons needing advanced technology skill upgrade, plus college grads from computer systems program
Princeton & District (Princeton) • Opened Dec 1996	Manager Administration/support 1 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• One-stop-shop for services — CSC is co-located with School District store front ABE facility	• School District	• employed and unemployed persons seeking skill upgrades
		• Community Forest Corporation with 25% of profits to support CSC training activities	• Township of Princeton	• no clients — rather a future source of revenue for CSC
		• Community website to provide information and promote community; plus training in website programming	• School District	• youth with interest in computers and website design
		• Career resource centre — employment services, Starting Points, career counselling, job bank, independent job search supports, EIP, CAP	• HRDC and MAETT on contract	• EI and IA job seekers

CSC (Community)	Current Staff	High Profile Projects	Partners	Clients Served
Revelstoke • Opened Apr 1995	Manager Administration/support 1 Career Centre: Administration Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• Created new teaching facility — CSC is co-located with college	• Okanagan University College	• employed and unemployed seeking training
		• Formal partnership agreement between School District and OUC on delivery of ABE with CSC promoting ABE programs and marketing need for education	• OUC and School District	• adults needing educational upgrade or Dogwood
		• Certified computer courses with Internet based testing	• VUE — a centre for computer training certification	• persons needing a technical skills upgrade
		• Community Career Centre (separate from CSC) — assessment, career counselling, job bank, CAP, TWS, assisted job search program	• OUC, School District and Community Futures	• EI and IA job seekers
		• Worksite computer training lab providing educational upgrades (PLATO), computer skills and sawmill related training	• Downie Sawmill	• forestry and sawmill workers

CSC (Community)	Current Staff	High Profile Projects	Partners	Clients Served
Sparwood • Opened Jun 1996	Manager Administration/support 1 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor Fernie office Administration/support 1 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• One-stop-shop for employment services (in Sparwood and Fernie) — career counselling, TWS, job bank, Starting Points, assisted job search program	• HRDC and MAETT on contract	• EI and IA job seekers
Trail • Opened Apr 1997	Manager Administration/support 2 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• Community Needs Assessment • ABE at CSC (with PLATO) and co-locating with School District • Delivery of part-time vocational training • Youth Enterprise Program — to encourage development of small business • One-Start-Employment Centre — employment counselling, assessment, referrals	• Selkirk College • School District and Selkirk College • School District and Selkirk College • Community Futures • Selkirk College and Family and Individual Resource Centre Society	• no clients — a community planning initiative • adults needing educational upgrade or Dogwood • employed and unemployed persons needing skill upgrades • youth with an interest in entrepreneurship • EI and IA job seekers

CSC (Community)	Current Staff	High Profile Projects	Partners	Clients Served
Vancouver East • Opened 1996	Manager Administration/support 7 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor Downtown East-side site: Administration/support 1 Instructor/facilitator/ counsellor	• Project to put youth and technology into community agencies for work experience • Business Resource Services • Businesses for Technical Literacy — refurnishing computers and putting into community agencies • Website development providing access to LMI and distributed learning programs delivered through Neighbourhood Houses • Public access point (accommodating the poor clients) for employment counselling, LMI resources, free telephone message service, computers, and Internet	• Capilano College • Langara College • Businesses and community service providers • Neighbourhood Houses and other community partners • Response to public need	• unemployed youth • small entrepreneurs • no clients — rather a capacity building initiative for community agencies • EI and IA job seekers and those needing skill upgrades • EI and IA job seekers

CSC Program Description: Selected Examples of Range of Programming Provided

As with the programming listings, this is not an exhaustive list of programming, but it does cover the range of training content and processes. There are interpretive comments at the end of this section.

Advanced Technology

- Advanced computer courses — A+ certification, Novell, CNN certification on-line
- GIS, GSP, Micro Station, ARC-View, ARC-Info;
- Website design, Auto CAD;
- MS Certified Systems Engineer; MS Certified Network Engineer; Network Administrator;
- PC tech repair.

Skills Upgrade, Vocational, Technical, Trade

- Horticulture, silviculture;
- Small engine repair;
- Carpentry;
- Grounds keeping (for golf course);
- Early childhood education;
- Basic computer literacy (intro to Internet, Word, etc.);
- Security guard training;
- Calving course, manure management;
- Trail maintenance;
- Bark beetle control;
- Eco-tourism course;
- Fuel handling (at an airport);
- Fishing guardianship training;
- Corrections officer training (enhances basic Justice Institute training);
- Basic wood technologies, basic sawing;
- Avalanche control, guide and safety issues training;
- WHMIS, heavy equipment operation, Class 3 driver, mine rescue, industrial first aid;
- Forest fire suppression training;
- Dry kiln operation, log scaling.

Business Management, Professional Development

- E-commerce;
- Dale Carnegie;
- Office support specialist program;
- Stage public presentations with well-known speakers on relevant economic development topics;
- Leadership training;
- Management in Aboriginal communities;

- Retail management (e.g., stock taking, marketing);
- Marketing and commodity prices for farmers (using Globalink);
- Supervisor training.

Adult Basic Education

- ABE (using self-paced, computer-based software);
- Basic math and English literacy;
- ESL.

Job Readiness, Career Preparation

- Career counselling;
- Career resource library and independent job search supports;
- Self-directed career planning (e.g., Discover software);
- Job boards, job banks, Community Access Program Internet terminals;
- Connections program (job search, résumé assistance for long-term income assistance recipients);
- Starting Points;
- Head Start (independent job search program for EI recipients);
- Assisted job search program (3 week);
- Early Intervention Program.

Other

- Management services for forest worker transition program;
- Targeted Wage Subsidy.

Three main features of the programming highlighted above should be noted. One is the individual variation from community to community in CSC size and operational structure. There are as few as 4 staff in one CSC (a recently operational one) and as many as 32 in another. Again, it is important to remember that these figures are not precise, given the changing human resources situation in CSCs and the ambiguity of categories for identifying "staff." But the wide range is notable.

The second feature is the breadth of programming as well as the commonality of many of the programs offered. There is a central core of educational and skills upgrading — ABE, basic computer literacy, and advanced technology training and upgrading. Then there is a vast array of other courses, usually developed in a process of needs identification with individuals, community groups, or employers. Courses include bark beetle control, many kinds of safety skills upgrading, agricultural skills enhancement (calving, commodities pricing), management skills, etc.

Finally, because partnership is a major objective of the CSCs and their relationship with the public training sector is an important issue, it should be noted that fully 19 of the 20 CSCs have some form of partnership with either the local School District and/or a post-

secondary institution. (The latter can be at the college or university level, and may or may not be with a local branch. Some CSCs have the partnership with a college or university whose main campus is elsewhere, whether or not they have a local campus.) Thirteen of the CSCs have partnerships with School Districts and 16 with a post-secondary institution.

We now turn from the descriptive level of the evaluation findings, to the evaluative aspect — starting with the findings on objectives achievement.

3.2.2 Findings on Objectives Achievement

In the following discussion of each of the objectives, we will include highlights of descriptive findings, such as what was done to meet the objective and what the perspectives and experiences were of various respondent groups on the objective being considered. We will also provide our assessment as evaluators of the degree to which each objective was achieved. Some of the findings for certain objectives are based largely on qualitative data, some on quantitative, and some on a mix of both. As stated in the methodology section, the nature of the question asked determined the data source, the collection strategy, and the analytical approach.

In assessing objectives achievement, it is important to keep in mind two things: one is that we are considering the CSCs in aggregate, and the other is that even though the five-year SI period is drawing to a close, there is considerable variation in the length of time that the 20 CSCs have been operational. It is inevitable that this will affect how completely any given objective is achieved. Thus, our evaluative assessment must be taken as an overview of general conditions or trends in processes and outcomes. There is a spectrum of success for the CSCs for each objective, conditioned in part by the length of time that they have been operational, and thus the findings should not be taken as characterizing each and every one of the 20. But we are confident that they are an accurate portrayal of the CSC/SI processes and outcomes for the CSC/SI as a whole.

Objective 1

> *To act as a focal point for bringing together community resources to increase access to training and to bridge between training and work by providing access to new training opportunities; adding values to existing programs and services; providing an access point for labour market information and programs and services that addresses the training needs of targeted client groups.*

There are several components of this objective, and we will begin with the "act as a focal point . . . to increase access to training and to bridge . . . to new training opportunities."

Act as a focal point

The CSCs as a group have made considerable efforts to achieve this component of Objective 1. Success has varied from community to community, but we believe that at least three-quarters of the CSCs have indeed served as a focal point for bringing together community resources. They do so by developing these types of processes.

- Establishing (or joining) informal or formal groups of training providers to identify training resources and consider how they may coordinate their training-related activities.

- Several CSCs have been essential elements of the development of a community-based "consortium" or "council" made up of public, non-profit and private sector trainers, as well as local business, industry, and economic development agencies.

- Thirteen of the CSCs have established training partnerships with their local School District, most often to share facilities and training delivery of ABE courses. Typically, the School District can count the students for their FTEs and the CSC has the benefit of some cost sharing, as well as increased access to individuals who may use other services in future.

- Sixteen of the CSCs have formed similar partnerships with public post-secondary institution(s). This is a clear indicator that the relationships between the CSCs and local branches of the college/university have improved considerably since the time of the formative evaluation. The research shows that at the local level in particular there has been a substantial increase in understanding and acceptance between the CSCs and the public post-secondary management and staff of each other's role and value for training in the community. It was common for local college/university respondents to speak positively of the training approach of the CSCs — their responsiveness in terms of set-up time, their flexibility of scheduling, the quality of service and the course offerings. CSCs and local colleges often expressed a wish that there were ways they could work together even more to meet more community training needs.

- The CSCs in several communities have "co-located" with public training agencies and employment-related government offices (MAETT, HRDC, MHR) and this has created a more efficient, more "user-friendly" environment for individuals to identify training needs, find appropriate job counselling and planning supports, and directly access training or related referrals.

- Since the time of the formative evaluation, the CSCs in general have made a great deal of progress in forming linkages with local business and industry. Managers and staff have increased their outreach to business and have included interested parties on advisory groups, or simply have strengthened their informal networks with this sector. The very few CSCs that originally did not see their role as including interaction with or service to business have recently come to value this sector more as an important part of their community, as a source of employment for clients, and as a possible source of revenue for training.

However, there are impediments or barriers to achieving this "focal point" component of Objective 1. In a few communities it has been difficult or impossible to work collaboratively at a planning or governance level with "competitors." In this small number of situations the stakeholder that is most likely to be concerned is the School District or college, but it can be private sector trainers. Also, at the Board level in some communities,

training opportunities that staff or some Board members identify are rejected by other members who see this as an opportunity for their own organization to deliver these services. Revenue generation is important for all stakeholders and it can be difficult to set this aside for what could be a larger community good. It is noteworthy that even in some communities where relationships at the Board and planning levels are difficult, there still may be actual business partnerships formed with the organizations to bid for and/or deliver services together.

Approximately one-half of the CSCs report that they have not been as effective in linking to and serving small business as they would like. In part, this is due to a generally agreed-upon weak "training culture" in business, but it is also due to the economic strains that businesses such as retailers or forest companies are now experiencing. They often feel they cannot pay for training, even if they recognize its value.

Access to accreditation is a barrier to CSC service provision in some areas, where partnerships are not formed between a CSC and the accrediting agency (School District, college, university, professional accreditation body, etc.).

Bridging versus duplicating/competing with other service providers

This is another issue that arises when considering the "bridging" component of this objective. That is, it was a basic tenet of the CSC model that the CSCs would bridge to existing or new training sources, but not become another trainer themselves. They would not, in other words, become competition, much less government-subsidized competition.

The ambiguity of this expectation, and the realities in which the CSCs and other stakeholders operate, is a persistent theme across the CSCs, their communities, and at all levels of government that provided input to the evaluation.

It is clear that there has been no resolution of this matter. Brokering in itself is not a clear concept. As a term, it does not actually appear in the objective, although it has been continually used throughout all communities and among all respondents involved in the CSC/SI since its beginning. While the term is not clear, it is clear that a considerable array of activities are included by respondents within that rubric. The one common theme seems to be that a CSC would not have on regular, full-time staff, individuals whose primary responsibility is direct, in-person delivery of training which originates in the CSC. Rather, they are to bring other training sources to the community, in whatever form of delivery this may be. It follows that the CSC would have the option of charging administrative fees for its overhead, but that is all.

In the "purest" case of brokering, a CSC might provide its computers, Internet lines, and space, at no cost, to a School District for ABE courses. The School District provides an accredited teacher as an on-site tutor, and the CSC receives no financial return from this arrangement. This has been done in one or two cases, but was discontinued if some cost recovery for the CSC could not be arranged. (In a way, this approach could be seen as the CSC subsidizing the public sector, and it is understandable that it is an arrangement that would not continue to be appealing, no matter how it is viewed.)

Much more often, a CSC provides its space, facilities, and even staff, to support training by a public or private sector trainer. The CSC sets an administrative fee for this and in turn may handle all inquiries, marketing, registration, and other administration. Many CSCs purchase instructional software which they then provide on a fee-for-service basis, based on local market value. (They may also subsidize the training through funding they have from government partners.) They may train their own staff to serve as tutors for the courses or contract this function out. Finally, a few CSCs have trained their own staff as trainers for specific courses (leadership training, management skills, advanced technology) and they deliver this training directly. Is the latter arrangement brokering?

In our view, a more appropriate working definition of brokering would be that of linking training resources to the community, in a "value-added" manner. By value-added we touch on the next element of Objective 1, the issue of not duplicating existing training services — in terms of curriculum content *and/or* delivery process. As a nexus between training resources and the community, consider the fact that CSCs usually hire local people to provide any in-person training. In some cases, it is their own staff who have been trained to develop and deliver certain kinds of training, but more often it is trainers from the community or region. Even when they bring in a trainer from outside, or when they purchase on-line training from a service provider far away, CSCs are linking these trainer resources to another source of income. For the most part, as we note below, what is being delivered is value-added in terms of content or process.

Given this rather broader definition of brokering (linking resources to consumers in a value-added manner) it can be concluded that the CSCs are, in fact, very successful in achieving this element of Objective 1. It does have to be borne in mind that in some communities, at certain points in time, there is some competition with other services, or duplication of services. However, there is also a great deal of collaboration, and we have no evidence from our extensive interviews that any other training source has been substantially impeded in its own work by the activities of the CSC.

Adding values to existing programs and services . . . that addresses the training needs of targeted groups . . .

The concept of adding value links closely to the previous point of providing access to new training opportunities. That is, the CSCs generally try to carve out a distinctive niche for their services by the use of technology and by their ability to have a very rapid response time for training course development, and meeting these needs through a flexible service schedule. They increased access to training opportunities by a combination of these factors — they brought in new courses — or courses new to their community (i.e., calving, commodities pricing, Dale Carnegie, interactive management seminars, etc.), or gave a new slant to standard courses (ABE, security services, electronic systems management) by virtue of the computer labs and provision of on-site tutors. Thus, in some cases they added value to training resources that were already available in other formats in the community, *or* they increased access through their mode of delivery.

There was some discussion among respondents from public and private sector training providers about whether this was a mode they themselves could use, or do use currently. There was also some concern about whether the CSCs overlapped their markets. But private sector respondents said that they themselves had a distinct niche and their own reputation to support their own success. Though they were not happy about the possibility of increased competition, in those few cases where the CSC did represent competition, the respondents said it was something they had to deal with in the normal course of business anyway. That the CSCs had government funding was seen as unfair, but no one in the private sector — locally or province-wide — felt that CSCs had caused any business to diminish or cease operations.

In our view, the programming that the CSCs offered, relying as it does on computer-based technology delivered on a very diverse and flexible schedule, sometimes at the work-site or elsewhere, does reflect adding value to existing training resources in the given communities. In doing this, and in bringing in or creating courses that were not otherwise available, they also increase access to new training opportunities. This is especially true for those clients who, for whatever reasons, cannot or will not turn to more traditional training sources.

As for the related theme of addressing the needs of *targeted* groups, there is a great deal of evidence that CSCs are active in identifying training needs of individuals and of groups, and then moving quickly to meet them. This is most evident in their service to employers, as was indicated in the survey of employers. But there are also many examples of a CSC being approached by just one or two individuals to discuss their training needs and the CSC then responded equally effectively in helping to meet them.

Employers reported that the Centre staff were accommodating and responsive to the needs of their organizations. They said that the Skills Centres' staff went out of their way to assist the companies with whatever they required. Staff made significant efforts to have ongoing, regular communications with the organizations to keep track of their training and employment needs, and to provide employers with information about the kinds of training that were available at the Centre. Respondents emphasized two particular aspects of this responsiveness.

The first was the Centre's ability to make all arrangements for training. In essence, the employer would tell the Centre what kind of training they were interested in, then the staff from the Centre would arrange everything. They would do the necessary research into the course content, design the course (either on their own or, whenever necessary, in conjunction with the employer), find an appropriate instructor, acquire the necessary materials for the course, and arrange the dates, times, locations and so on.

Activities of the Skills Centres' staff often included contacting various other organizations to see if there was any further interest in the broader community for that particular training program. In a few cases, the Centre even helped the firm find and hire people, by linking the employer with non-employees who may have taken the course as part of the community-wide marketing of it, and who performed especially well in the training.

These services resulted in a significant saving of time, energy, human resources and money for the employers. In some cases, employers would not have had the resources to do the necessary research and make the arrangements, so the training would simply not have taken place. In other cases, particularly for some of the larger employers, there has been a marked change in the company's approach to training and employment/hiring practices. The companies have been dramatically shifting their in-house training and personnel practices on to the Community Skills Centres because it is easier to do so.

— *The Centre calls and we meet so they can learn what the company's needs are. We describe what we need in terms of training and certification requirements. The Centre "goes and does" and gets back to us and tells us what's available, costs, dates, etc. We choose. We give them the names. The Centre pulls it together.*

— *They keep up to date on what the company's employment needs are, then when they have an upgraded person, they send them here. We've actually hired two guys permanently and two others temporarily.*

— *I phoned the Centre and spoke to them, then I went down there and brainstormed about what we were looking for. We already had instructors and materials, so then the Centre took over and flew with it. They set it up and arranged everything. They've been fantastic.*

— *I contact the manager and tell him what I want, then he sets it up. It's very simple. They arrange the classroom and the instructor and customize the course to exactly what our needs are.*

The second particularly beneficial aspect of the Centres' responsiveness is the related issue of the Skills Centres' ability to customize courses. Employers spoke very positively of the Centres' ability to evaluate the company's specific training needs; to assess the skills levels of the various employees requiring the training; to look at the relevant scheduling, equipment, and facility needs of the company; and then to arrange the course schedules, locations, instructors and so on to suit those custom requirements. When providing computer training, the assessment often included a complete analysis of the company's computer system as well as in-house, hands-on help in setting up the system, getting it up-and-running smoothly, and then providing ongoing follow-up help by phone and on-site.

— *They had to tailor the course to all ten people, so they did an assessment of everyone's needs. It was a really well-received process. It was definitely what we were looking for. They arranged three different facilitators for a two-day course.*

— *The manager gets all the information from all of the contractors and [the manager] knows what everybody needs. The courses really get tailored to your needs because she's familiar with everyone and everything.*

Other aspects of the Skills Centres' responsiveness to the needs of the various organizations related to the flexibility of the hours of the courses given at Centres, the accessibility of the Centres to clients for self-paced training at various times and on weekends, and the rapidity with which the Centres were able to respond to the employers' needs.

— *It was very flexible in their hours and when we could use it. We met twice weekly for seven weeks, afternoons or evenings and we ran it throughout the year.*

— *Our employees were on two-week shifts. Two weeks they work afternoons and two weeks they work days. And the courses accommodate that. No university in the country would fulfil that requirement. That and the acceptance of the environment and willingness to attend is amazing — 95* percent *of those workers would never walk through the door of a college because they'd just be too intimidated.*

From these quotes, which are typical ones, it is evident that the CSCs met not only the needs of the employers as a target group, but also the needs of the employees. The theme of the CSC being a more comfortable, positive environment for individuals who had had negative views of training or of training institutions is a common one and worth noting as one factor that contributes to the CSCs' increasing access to training opportunities. Certainly this showed up in a number of our interviews with community partners, including government representatives (who were most often involved in programming for persons on Employment Insurance or Income Assistance).

Employers also said that the Centre was truly a community asset, especially in the smaller, more isolated communities. They were pleased with the strong efforts of the Centres to focus on the needs of the community and to provide high quality, necessary services. Respondents tended to use a great many superlatives when describing the Centre, such as "terrific", "star plus", "godsend", "magnificent job", "great", "excellent", and so on.

— *I think it's one of the best things that has ever happened in the area. They filled the void. It's been a positive effect on the community because they are so responsive to people getting training relevant to their needs — custom training rather than packaged. Everyone seems to be very satisfied with the quality of what they deliver and they've also done really good brokering.*

— *They provide local people with work instead of taking them from the colleges. Our area is very specific and unique in terms of our needs. The Centre tailors courses to local conditions. Really good.*

On occasions when there had been some kind of problem, employers said it had been handled well by the Skills Centres. For example, in a few cases where there had been dissatisfaction with courses, these were improved, or if there were problems with training deliverers, these were either replaced or dealt with in some way so that they functioned better. Arrangements that had been slow in developing or disorganized were improved in

subsequent dealings with the Centre. Some employers commented that this fact essentially added to their positive perception of the Skills Centres because it demonstrated good management practices. The Centres' focus on monitoring courses, getting feedback from clients and employers, and showing concern for how the Centre was functioning added to that impression.

In terms of addressing the needs of targeted groups, the employer surveys provide a strong indication of the CSCs being very pro-active and effective. The evaluators cannot speak about employers who may have approached the local CSC and not had their needs met, because the research plan focused on assessing satisfaction of service users. However, in our interviews with community partners — a number of whom represented local businesses or business associations — there were no accounts of dissatisfaction, or of potential employers/employees meeting obstacles to training development and delivery.

. . . Access point for labour market information (LMI) . . .

At the time of the formative evaluation, this component of Objective 1 was one of the least-addressed by the CSCs as a group. This has changed appreciably since that time. We believe there are three main reasons for this, all of them arising out of what could be called "environmental" factors.

One reason is that the range of resources for LMI has greatly increased in the last several years. A number of federal and provincial initiatives have resulted in the development of several LMI tools geared to use by the public. Many of these are in electronic formats (as well as print form) and thus are readily accessible on the Internet or on CD-ROMs. Since the CSCs generally have free or low-cost access to the Internet on their computers, the public can link easily to these resources.

The second factor arises from the changes in the role of HRDC. Faced with downsizing and with legislative changes in its role in providing employment-related services, local Human Resources Centres are increasingly contracting out these services. Thus a number of CSCs have the contract to deliver employment counselling and referral services, and an integral feature of these is provision of LMI to those they serve. Several also deliver these kinds of services on behalf of MAETT.

The third factor is closely related to the second, in that 13 of the CSCs participated in the Enhanced LMI component of SI. Through these contracts they carried out a range of activities, including: identification of community needs for LMI; developing more detailed LMI at the community or regional level; providing alternate delivery modes; and supplementing related services (such as support of their career resource centres, which often was a part of the activities noted in the second factor above).

Given these three factors, CSCs definitely are much more involved in delivery of LMI since the formative evaluation and, by any measure, are very active in the development and/or delivery of this service. These services can be for particular contracted clients (as part of programming for displaced workers, for example, or for those on IA or EI who are expected to use the services) or for the public at large.

Summary of Findings for Achieving Objective 1

Since the formative evaluation, the CSCs as a group could be seen to have made considerable progress in meeting this objective as a whole. As a group, they are very much involved in activities that address this multi-faceted objective. They have established both informal and formal means of bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in their respective communities. They are very active in establishing partnerships with other trainers, in both the private and public sectors. All but one have formed some type of training partnership with their local School District and/or college branch. Several CSCs have co-located with public sector training agencies and employment-related government offices. There also has been a substantial increase in linkages with business and industry, although approximately one-third of the Centres would like to be more effective in this area.

Even with this generally positive picture, there are impediments to acting as a focal point. In a few communities the various training sectors have not been able to come to a resolution of the perceived or actual potential for competition among each other for training opportunities.

Since the formative evaluation, there has been no resolution of the issue of what bridging or brokering training is, as opposed to direct delivery itself. In our view, an appropriate working definition of brokering would be that of linking training resources to the community, in a "value-added" manner. If this definition can be accepted as a reasonable one, then the CSCs are very successful in meeting this element of Objective 1. They hire local trainers on a contract basis, a few CSCs have their own regular staff specially trained to deliver certain kinds of courses, and they link other training resources (individuals or programs) via electronic technology to local and regional training consumers.

The CSCs as a group definitely add value to existing programs and services. The primary means is the use of technology to address the needs of a range of target groups for self-paced, highly flexible training modes. Another means is the structure of operations of CSCs themselves, in that the facilities are open on a very broad schedule, they are very "non-traditional" in terms of the learning environment, and are provided by staff that are uniformly regarded as highly skilled in dealing with consumers. This approach is both practical and supportive for those clients in particular who have found traditional learning contexts intimidating or unwelcoming. The sheer breadth of programming, often developed as a just-in-time response to needs identified with an employer or individual(s), also extends the access to training content within the community.

As for increasing access to labour market information, the CSCs have considerably strengthened this component of their programming since the formative evaluation. In parts this is because there is a great deal more LMI available, in much more accessible and user-friendly formats. It also reflects the fact that CSCs have been awarded contracts for delivering this kind of informational service as both the federal and provincial governments have turned over more of this to community deliverers. They also were very active in participating in the Enhanced LMI component of the SI, and integrated these efforts into their related programming.

Objective 2

To increase community input and decision making regarding training and adjustment issues by developing CSC training plans; assessing community environment; and establishing consultation and decision-making processes.

The processes that address Objective 2 are not entirely distinct from those of Objective 1 — in both cases they deal with identifying training needs and resources through community involvement. Objective 2 can be seen as more narrowly focused on the means by which CSCs are to develop their *training plans, per se*, as distinct from how they develop their strategy for identifying their niche and working collaboratively within the larger community environment.

The reader will know that a CSC was expected to be run as a non-profit organization, governed by a community board. The Board was to be representative of a full range of stakeholders from the community, including representation from equity groups (women, First Nations, etc.). This is a common model for government-supported, community economic development organizations (such as Community Futures Development Corporations).

At the time of the formative evaluation we noted that the CSC Boards were the main means of incorporating community input into their training plans. At the time, there was little in the way of other more formal or systematic feedback processes that CSCs were using. The Boards tended to be fairly diverse, and often included members who were very well established in the community and quite involved in community economic and social development issues. The Boards were still struggling to be as diverse as was expected of them. They also found that there were some inherent tensions built into the expectations for diverse composition, in that some of the members reflected interests that were — at least at first — seen as competitive or at cross-purposes. In addition, many Boards reported at that time that they felt they still had a lot to accomplish in reaching out more to the community as a whole and to business and industry in particular.

Now these several years later, it appears that there has not been a great deal of change in the situation. First, the Board continues to be the main mechanism for gathering community input, but the contradictions they must deal with in terms of composition have not been resolved. For example, if they try to have a widely diverse Board, for the sake of meeting the expectations of breadth, some CSCs have found that this can be counter-productive. That is, if they are trying to be very entrepreneurial and want to have a high concentration of members with business expertise, they may have problems having enough openings left to fill this need. A related issue is that a few Boards, those from the most entrepreneurial CSCs (i.e., those most focusing on revenue generation), prefer to have Board members from businesses that have been or are likely to be fee-paying service users. One CSC has decided, in fact, to have only this category of member on its Board. This tends to limit the breadth of the CSCs community base, however much it may respond to the operating goals of the particular CSC.

Another dilemma related to Board composition that about a quarter of the CSCs continue to face is that the representatives of some of the various training organizations tend to place the interests of their organization over that of the CSCs interests. The other CSCs, virtually all of which do have representation from various training sectors, have worked out a number of ways to try to resolve differences and address community-wide priorities. Some have formed a consortium-type entity of which all are a part and they work out at that level what each one's role will be. Sometimes the approach is more informal and they decide which of them will pursue an idea, whether it be the CSC itself, the CSC and another organization as partners, or the other organization on its own.[8]

However, a very small number of CSCs have decided not to have a Board structure for governance. Either the Board has simply melted away in practice, or a formal decision has been taken to operate independently of it. In these situations, the Board had become completely inactive, in any case.

As for using other means of eliciting community input for training plans, the Boards have been somewhat more active in conducting systematic training needs assessments, or community forums, etc., either on their own or as part of a community effort. But this has rarely been satisfactory, mainly because the research or consultation process was either not well conceived in the first place or the project was not well executed even if it was a reasonable approach. Certainly, that CSCs that used this method did not find the results satisfactory.[9]

Another difficulty in achieving this objective arises out of the economic environment in which the CSCs operate. That is, no matter how good their intentions may be, or how effective their planning processes, the question is often put by respondents, "How do we develop a realistic training plan when the economy is in such a downturn here?" This dilemma is reflected in community after community, especially those hard-hit by downsizing in the resources sectors.

This issue is recognized at senior government levels as well, as we learned in our interviews with respondents at those levels. As one of these respondents said:

> *Over the last four or five years circumstances have changed dramatically — we didn't predict back then that the forest industry would die, so the major funding we expected from FRBC didn't come through and is now gone. And the changes in HRDC and the way it funds programs has had and will have a major impact on CSCs and how they can respond.*

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8 The Consortium has promoted Board development training, and a number of CSCs have taken advantage of that to enhance their functioning as a Board, both in relation to their own membership and in relation to the larger community.

9 As researchers who have conducted community training needs assessments, we would like to note that it is a deceptively difficult task. Thus we do not imply fault on the part of the CSCs (or even on the part of the contractors who worked for them) for the results not being as useful as they had hoped.

This theme will return when we discuss Objective 4 (financial independence), but it does help to place into the larger context the *environmental* constraints within which CSCs have been expected to plan.

Summary of Findings for Achieving Objective 2

The CSCs have made progress since the formative evaluation in achieving this objective, but there remains room for improvement. Boards continue to be the central conduit for eliciting community input into CSC training plans. This is a strength, but it also can be limiting if the Board is either too diverse to have the concentration of skills a given CSC needs to meet its own goals for training needs identification, development and delivery; *or* if the Board has members who feel they must put the interests of the organization they represent ahead of the interests of the CSC. No matter how well the Board or CSC as a whole may operate to develop community-based training plans, because many of the CSCs are located in economically vulnerable areas, it is difficult to plan for advancing economic change through training when the economic opportunities may be decidedly limited. The changes in federal/provincial policies and funding allocations have also changed the context in which CSCs operate and plan. There has been substantial shrinkage of direct and indirect government funding amounts since the CSC/SI was instituted.

Objective 3

> *To increase competitiveness of business and industry in the global marketplace and individuals in the labour market by providing services to encourage the use of technology; participating in inter-connected province-wide network of training services; and building on and collaborating with existing technology services, groups and individuals in local communities.*

This objective has essentially three parts — objectives for business and industry, for individuals, and achievement of the objective through the use of (electronic) technology.[10] When the CSC/SI was first being implemented, the computer systems they had were often the most advanced of any training facility in a given community. This was especially true in the smaller communities, and, to a somewhat lesser degree, it continues to be so.

It is clear that the CSCs as a whole have made substantial use of their computer-based technology. It would be fair to say that it has formed the core of their training delivery. In Objective 1 it has already been noted that they often deliver self-paced, computer-based training in an extremely wide array of subjects, from ABE in partnership with local School Districts, to commodity pricing for grain growers. Whether the CSC focuses on revenue generation in its training facilitation, or is at the other end of the continuum of client targeting (i.e., concentrating almost entirely on serving economically and socially vulnerable clients, who may or may not be on some form of social benefit), or anywhere

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10 At the time the CSCs were being developed, the province expected to have a province-wide network of training services fully in place. It has only now begun to materialize, and so this element of the objective could not be addressed — in the formative or summative evaluations. The use by the CSCs of their own technology is another matter, and this can indeed be evaluated.

in between, all have actively sought ways to identify training needs that can be met through the use of electronic technology. Their efforts have been quite successful. The CSC Consortium has played a useful role in assisting CSCs to achieve cost savings where possible (i.e., purchase of training software and upgrading of hardware).

In contrast to the extensive use of the computer-based technology, there is generally much less use of the videoconferencing capacity. Most CSCs did explore this potential early on, but discovered a number of impediments to its use. These included the lack of appropriate telecommunications lines into a community; a system that was not sufficiently fast and sophisticated to make its use efficient or appealing; lack of compatibility with some other systems; and costs that few consumers felt they could handle.

There were occasional exceptions to this lack of use, however. A few very large companies used the videoconferencing for interviewing job applicants. They would develop a short list based on these interviews and bring one or two candidates into the community for a final in-person interview. They found this very cost-effective. There were a few instances of training where the trainer was in one CSC and there were participants elsewhere in the province, or even at national or international locations. This occurred when there was an internationally known trainer in, for example, Excellence in Management, and the numbers of participants world-wide were so great that costs to individuals were quite modest. Another example was that in one community, the justice system conducted witness interviews from a distance via the CSCs videoconferencing services.

It seems to the evaluators that the environment is not yet "ripe" for efficient and cost-effective use of videoconferencing, especially as a training tool. Even if it were, the CSCs as a whole would require a major upgrading of equipment, and there would have to be compatible telecommunications lines into the community (though the latter is changing rapidly as we write).

The extensive use of the computer technology base for training warrants further documentation here of the outcome of these efforts. The key respondents at the senior government levels, and the community partners, Boards, staff and management generally concur that the impacts and effects of the use of this technology are very positive. Some useful additional data that explicitly document its impacts on users of training and of employment-related services come from three survey sources. These are the employer/employee surveys, the additional analysis of selected data from the baseline and comparison group surveys, and the focus groups with current participants in CSC programming. We will highlight some of these findings here, but the reader is also referred to Volume 2, the Technical Report, for the more detailed findings from which these highlights are drawn.

a. *Did the CSCs Increase the Competitiveness of Business and Industry? Perspectives of Employers Surveyed*

Fifty-eight employers who had contracted for the services of their local CSC to train their employees were interviewed for the evaluation. There were 9 CSCs sampled from the 20 to provide names of employers with whom they had worked at least once. The evaluators then sampled from this list to select respondents.[11] The range of sectoral representation among the respondents was:

Sectoral Representation of Employers Surveyed	
Pulp and paper, forestry companies	25%
Community organizations and agencies, including social service agencies, hospitals, libraries, family and youth organizations, chamber of commerce, immigrant agencies, etc.	25%
Small and medium-sized business (retail, recreational, etc.)	20%
Heavy industry (other than pulp and paper, forestry)	12%
Provincial agencies (e.g., FRBC, Forestry, Parks)	8%
School districts and OLA	5%
Other (unions, utilities, light industry, banks, etc.)	5%

The interviews were conducted by telephone, as a distinct component of the overall research plan, and, with only two exceptions, these employers did not overlap with those interviewed as part of the case studies, *per se*.

Of the 58 respondents, 90 percent used the training services at the CSC.[12] Among the 58 respondents, 33 percent said that they had had training delivered at their job site, with 17 percent having the CSC training services provided at one or more of the local public post-secondary institutional facilities (college and/or university). Three quarters of the training the employers purchased was in basic computer and software skills (MS Office, Internet use). Thus, the CSCs used their technology to teach the technology.

Nearly one-half of the employers utilized training in management and administrative skills (accounting, project management, negotiating skills, conflict management). Nearly one-half also used the CSC for skills upgrading, either to increase efficiency and productivity or to meet rising standards for various certifications (safety, *Forest Practices Code*, wood technology, etc.). Many of these courses were based on software the CSC had purchased or utilized interactive programming such as on-line programming from the South Alberta Institute of Technology (power engineering at several levels is a staple of this kind of programming for clients from forest products companies).

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11 See the Employer and Employee survey report in Volume 2 for a more detailed account of the methodology and sampling strategy for both surveys.

12 This could include brokered training by a trainer arranged for by the CSC, computer-based distance learning purchased by the CSC and provided on a fee-for-service basis, or training delivered by CSC staff.

When asked how useful the employers found their CSC-facilitated training, 73 percent found it "very useful" and another 14 percent found it "quite useful." Some typical comments from employers on why they found the training useful are:

— *The Centre was fast and convenient, flexible and cost-effective. We had immediate results from the training. The knowledge gained was immediately useful for us.*

— *They've been a godsend. Your guy can go out during the day and work and then go to the Centre at night. That's the beauty of it. It's very beneficial and they're very accommodating. It's not optional anymore if you're working in the woods. It's kept us abreast of employment requirements. We have to have the certifications to get the contracts. We want people to be aware of the codes so they are not out there being in violation of it. It only makes for trouble in the community. In a small community the CSC is the life-line between the companies and doing business.*

— *High-end professionals came to the community with a great depth of experience and it's very tailored to the youth we are actually dealing with. It improved the quality and success ratio of our work with the kids — young offenders — so it was a huge benefit societally and provincially.*

— *We're very excited about the first set of courses. If you can really understand the larger picture of what you're doing, then you understand what the details are about. With that knowledge the workers can go into the bush and apply the knowledge and understand it and learn faster that way. It's improved the quality of work a great deal. It's allowed me to expand my company. Because now that I have more trained personnel, I can take on more work.*

— *Very good — it was an opportunity to learn more. For my employees it was a whole new way of looking at the world. It opened their eyes. They saw and got excited by new concepts in business. It really encouraged them to learn and grow.*

Cost saving was another way in which the training was useful to the employers. The savings were in terms of less expensive courses than others they might have considered in the past, as well as the use of partnered courses. In the latter case, a number of employers noted that as the CSC developed the course that employer needed, CSC staff would market the course to the public and other employers. If others attended, this reduced the cost for all concerned.

Some of our local people wouldn't have been able to compete in the industry in our small community. We are at more of a disadvantage because we couldn't get the training we needed. We couldn't compete with the bigger companies who have in-house training budgets. And we couldn't afford to send people to Vancouver. We can't afford that in a small company. The college is run in another town, so they have to

keep justifying putting on the course for them. Also the Centre has tried to get local trainers qualified to deliver training here, so it's way cheaper than using a travelling trainer. Also it's providing work for local people, instead of having to use staff from the colleges, such as British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT).

The use of videoconferencing for screening job applicants has already been mentioned. One company saved travel money and time by using videoconferencing to have monthly meetings with their headquarters. Some employers who represented smaller companies reported that the cost saving was crucial specifically because they were smaller.

We've done about seven videoconferences for conferences. It's worked out very well for us and saved us a lot of money. It's more efficient actually when you're just trying to get some business done and get on with your work — videoconferencing is very effective.

Speaking of costs, it is of interest that of the 35 employers who discussed their methods of financing of training, half of them had paid the entire costs of this training. About one-third had some form of subsidy or other support, from Forest Renewal BC, HRDC, or even from the CSC itself. About 10 percent had had a mix of the types of support and self-payment they had used. But when it is considered that it is often assumed that business and industry are not part of a "training culture" or that in times of economic downturn they are very unlikely to invest in training, the fact that half of these employers did indeed pay for their training in full suggests that the assumptions could bear further examination.[13]

When asked how well they were satisfied with the training and other services they received from the CSCs, 78 percent said they were "very satisfied" and another 12 percent said they were "satisfied." As another indicator of satisfaction, 52 percent have definite plans to use the CSCs services again, another 26 percent plan to, but have not firmed up the plans, and 14 percent have already done so since they received the services they described to us for the evaluation.

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13 Of course, it must be kept in mind that these are employers who were already willing to make the commitment to training, so they may not be broadly representative of employers in general. But still, there may be more variation in attitudes toward training than is commonly assumed.

Ninety-eight percent of respondents said that the training and services offered by the CSCs are "unique" and that they would not find, or had not found, these services elsewhere. These responses are summarized as follows:

EXHIBIT 1
What Employers Found Unique or Better About the Skills Centre Compared to Experiences with Training from Other Sources: # and % of Respondents (N = 58)*

No. of Respondents	% of Respondents	
45	78	Centre was easier, faster, more flexible, more responsive, etc.
36	62	Lower cost
29	50	Centre offered some types of training that weren't available otherwise.
20	35	Skills Centre was closer, more convenient, etc.
15	26	Centre had facilities, technology, or services that weren't available elsewhere.
9	16	Centre has contacts (e.g., to trainers) that other sources don't.
1	2	Union wouldn't have got involved otherwise.
0	0	Employer's organization wouldn't have got involved otherwise.
13	22	Various other
58	100	TOTAL RESPONDING*

* Categories sum to more than the totals because multiple choices were allowed. Missing data excluded.

Typical comments elaborating on these reasons are:

— *They were very flexible, not rigid 8:00 — 5:00. They were more than willing to put programs on for businesses when they want them. I didn't have to make a zillion calls off-island and bring someone in to do the training.*

— *Flexibility in terms that the client can take training at his convenience. Not a classroom type structure. These are on shift workers, family people. They have time on Saturday morning at nine a.m. and the college or the school is closed. I can't stress this enough. The school district is too much like going back to a school environment with younger people. At the Centre no one knows what they're studying.*

— *Right next door, on their own schedule — much better for working people. It offers packaged office space without the high price — a nice place where the kids didn't feel in a basement. They were treated way better than at other places. Very business-like. No raised eyebrows. Adaptive to the clients and treated them well.*

— *They have the ability to deal with multi-ethnic populations — they're just very student-friendly. They're really accessible to those clients, above and beyond the call. There's a fear factor for my clients and disenfranchised people when dealing with technology. The Centre is very professional in dealing with them in a very good, positive manner.*

— *It provided a valuable contribution to our community in training. There really is very little available for adult learning. The college is targeting different needs, personal development. There is no venue for customized training or for the facilities. If you want to train your employees and customize a course and bring in an instructor for a specific course, you need to use the Skills Centre.*

In sum, the employers surveyed have an overwhelmingly positive response to the value of the training and related services provided by the CSCs with which they dealt. It would be fair to say that these services have indeed increased their competitiveness, if a more highly skilled and confident workforce can be taken to contribute to this outcome. They believe it does and it seems logical to the evaluators as well.

b. Employees' Perspectives on Whether CSC Training and Related Services Increased Their Own Competitiveness in the Labour Market

There were 122 employees interviewed from the names given us by eight of the CSCs of all employees sponsored by the employers drawn on for the employer survey. Typically, we randomly selected enough names to allow us to complete two interviews for each employer. (The eight CSCs were selected for a combination of reasons, including location, size, general type of operation, and ability to provide names and current contact information for employees.) Thus, the employees generally reflected the same range of sectors and occupations covered by the employers.

Not surprisingly, given that these employees were sponsored for training by their employer, 73 percent said that they took the training to enhance their skills for their current jobs. Interestingly, 20 percent, the next largest single response, took the training to help them change jobs or change careers. (Considering that a number of trainees were from companies or sectors that are in transition, this seems like a reasonable rationale for use of CSC training or related services.)

A number of employees took more than one kind of training, with the largest single proportion (45 percent) having had basic training in computers (use of a personal computer, MS Office, use of the Internet). Forty-three percent took management or administrative training, and 27 percent pursued skills upgrading in their occupation, or trained to meet heightened certification standards (*Forest Practices Code*, safety, etc.). Sixteen percent upgraded their basic education levels (GED, etc.)

One-fifth of the respondents (19 percent) reported that they also used the resources of the CSC for counselling or advice on training options or career planning. A slightly smaller proportion drew on the CSC for labour market information and information on training

elsewhere. (We expect that this "cluster" of responses was given by the same respondents, but cannot be sure from this level of analysis.)

The great majority of employees found the CSC training and services very useful. Seventy-three percent ranked it as "very useful" and another 16 percent chose "useful" as their summary choice. No one found it "not at all" or "not very" useful. Some typical comments are:

— *It was totally useful. I got more out of that two weeks than I got out of the whole previous year. And now I will get further training because the company saw the benefits of that training — they're putting me in an apprenticeship program because they saw such improvement. Now that they've seen the benefit of having someone who is perfectly trained, they've hired an expert to work here and train me. So it actually created a job.*

— *In running a non-profit association, the Centre really helped me see the business world in a wider sense, made me more aware of the business management side of things, and I have a more business-oriented approach. For example, I think about advertising and marketing rather than just using the word of mouth which is common to non-profit organizations (who are focused on just surviving). I have more power and a more business-like approach when dealing with other organizations — an "expecting something" approach, and an ability to make more demands where appropriate.*

— *The content was everything and more than I was hoping for. It was a little bit of everything — memory skills, people skills, public confidence. I got something out of every section of the course.*

— *I got more than I ever dreamed out of it.*

The impact of this increase in skills was even noticed at a community level. As a staff person from a multi-service social service agency said:

— *It was extremely useful because it was aimed at a specific request to do some community building. I really notice a difference throughout the community — the people who didn't go to the course aren't as good now at communication. The more people who are talking the same language, the better it is.*

Respondents also reported that the training improved their employability. Those clients who were already employed said that acquiring skills improved their resumés and provided them with certificates, tickets, etc. This was believed to improve their chances of moving up in their position or changing their job, or increasing their salary level. Some respondents who had been unemployed said the training helped them to get or change jobs.

Clients also said that the training made them feel more confident (either in general or in doing their jobs), increased their morale, and increased their insight into the skill needs or safety requirements of their business.

— *The course was great. It gave me the confidence to train other people. When I started [the course on how to train more effectively] I was as nervous as the new people, but the course really built my confidence a lot. After the course I was able to really train them. I trained people before the course and then after. The two groups are completely different employees as a result of how I trained them.*

For respondents who had taken little or no training past their period of formal education, they found that taking the CSC courses made them feel better about getting training in general. These respondents said they went into the training feeling shy or nervous about their abilities, or disinterested in getting further education. They came out of the training feeling more confident about their abilities, motivated to improve their skills even more, or surprised by the level of improvement they could acquire from the training. They generally reported that they were indeed interested in getting more training in future.

— *I'm a lot smarter than I thought I was. Before I started I felt like a loser — I'd go to work and come home feeling like a dead person. Now I'm really into studying. Now I feel good about it as opposed to not feeling anything. In the past, the company made all the employees feel like losers. Things have changed drastically in the workplace as a result of the training. Now the company sees that they have high school graduates and even college level. Attitudes are changing.*

— *Before I went in I was intimidated. I didn't think I could get it. The training definitely made me think I can do it. And you aren't singled out. If you can't get it, it doesn't matter — it's not like in school. So I definitely feel a lot better now.*

— *I was intimidated, scared to try it. Even when I phoned about the course, the person was very comforting and reassuring. So I agreed, knowing my job would require it soon. The courses are good things. Then I ended up setting up a three-company computer system. I wouldn't have been able to operate a million dollar operation without it.*

— *I really want to get more training. I wasn't aware of the level of expertise I would get to.*

— *It makes me want more training. I was a bit shy of going to the Centre. Now I'm so comfortable down there and I'm delighted I went. Those people are so helpful, it's unbelievable.*

— *The training bug has bitten me.*

There were a few problems mentioned by a small number of respondents. These respondents found that for them the courses they took were too superficial for their needs or they found that too much information was crammed into too short a course. There was also occasional dissatisfaction with either the knowledge level or the behaviour of the instructors. We do not know the outcome of these circumstances.

It is apparent, then, that for the employees surveyed, the training and related services they received at the CSC are seen as excellent in quality and valuable for enhancing their skill levels and overall employability. They are extremely pleased with, if not to say downright grateful for, the manner in which the staff at all levels interacts with them. There are decided spin-off benefits of increased confidence in their ability to learn and an increased awareness (or first awareness) of the value of life-long learning.

c. What the Baseline and Comparison Group Surveys Tell Us About Whether CSC Training and Related Services Increased Competitiveness in the Labour Market

The series of surveys of CSC participants and a comparison group that was conducted for the second stage of the evaluation process as a whole has been reported elsewhere in some depth by the survey firm that carried out that research. Thanks to the timely cooperation of the staff at the survey firm, we were able to go back to the database and conduct what we refer to as a meta-analysis of selected variables.

The first of these surveys, completed in February 1998, interviewed 806 individuals who had enrolled in a training program at a CSC late in 1997 and 418 non-CSC EI or IA recipients as a comparison group. Follow-up interviews with 561 of the same CSC participants and 280 respondents from the comparison group were completed in October 1998.

The findings in the brief report we prepared (see Volume 2, Technical Report) and from which these summary findings are drawn, are based on a sub-sample of respondents from the surveys. The meta-analysis focused on incrementality, that is, what benefit does the CSC training experience have for the people that they might not have received otherwise. This was done by comparing respondents who participated in training at a CSC and were receiving EI or IA benefits prior to beginning their CSC training with respondents from a comparison group of respondents who were receiving EI or IA benefits late in 1997 (the same time the CSC group was beginning their training). This comparison will focus on respondents' employment situation at the time of the follow-up interview in October 1998. We selected this EI/IA sub-sample of CSC participants from among the complete sample, which would include participants who were employed or not on these benefits, because the comparison group consisted solely of EI/IA beneficiaries. Therefore, for the most precise comparability for measuring incrementality, the database we created for our analysis was confined to EI/IA individuals from the CSC and the other group.

The findings are based on the following groups:

- N = 90 CSC respondents who were receiving EI benefits prior to beginning participation in training at a CSC;
- N = 79 CSC respondents who were receiving IA benefits prior to beginning participation in training at a CSC;
- N = 171 comparison group respondents who were receiving EI benefits late in 1997 and did not participated in training at a CSC;
- N = 109 comparison group respondents who were receiving IA benefits late in 1997 and did not participated in training at a CSC.

The analysis compared the two groups overall on key outcome variables. It also compared EI recipients (N=90) who participated in CSC training with the EI recipients from the comparison group (N=171), and the IA recipients who participated in CSC training (N=79) with the IA recipients from the comparison group (N=109). The four key employment-related outcome variables are:

1. Employment rates: the percentage of respondents who were employed at the time of the follow up interview;
2. The length of time employed;
3. The occupational distribution of the employment;
4. The NOC Skill Level of the employment.

The full description of findings is in the Technical Report, complete with tables. The following presents the summary results for each of the four outcomes.

1. Employment

More than two-thirds (68 percent) of all of the sub-sample from both groups who were receiving EI benefits in late 1997 were employed at the time of the follow-up interview in October 1998. Comparing the EI respondents from the CSCs and the comparison group, there is a modest difference of outcome. The CSC EI participants had a 63 percent employment rate and the EI comparison group had a rate of 71 percent .

It is of interest, though the findings are not statistically significant,[14] that further analysis of those comparison group members who had received employment-related training elsewhere (N=28 on EI and N=19 on IA) showed an appreciably higher employment rate than those who had had no training.

The proportion of those on IA from both groups who were employed at the time of the survey point was quite low. That is, just little more than one-quarter (27 percent) of the total of our sub-sample of respondents who were receiving IA benefits in late 1997 were employed at the time of the follow-up interview in October 1998. Within that total number

[14] The Chi square statistic with a 0.05 level of confidence was used for all tests of statistical significance in the analysis.

of IA recipients, CSC respondents are substantially more likely than those from the comparison group to have been employed at that time (41 percent vs. 17 percent , statistically significant). However, there is a much higher proportion of long-term IA recipients in the comparison group who often have multiple barriers to employment and thus their appreciably lower rates are to be expected.

Thus we see that the CSC experience has the most substantial benefit for the IA recipient and less notable benefits for the EI individual, compared with the non-CSC person on EI.

We also would like to cross-refer to our other evaluation studies which show clearly that there is a decided difference in employment-readiness between EI recipients as a whole and those on IA, especially those who have been on IA for prolonged periods. Thus, we see that the EI recipients as a group have stronger employment outcomes, with not much difference between the CSC and non-CSC group. The IA recipients have much lower employment rates, but the CSC experience seems to have a more decided positive impact on this target group. Given the barriers many of them face, this may well speak to the *relative* efficacy of the CSC approach to programming.

2. Length of Time Employed

Among those previously receiving EI benefits, comparison group respondents had been employed appreciably longer at the time of the follow-up interview than those CSC participants (a statistically significant finding). It is not possible to know what may contribute to this finding, though it may be that the very fact that CSC participants were indeed in training reflects time spent in training rather than in employment. (It would take a longer follow-up period and more detailed questioning to have more information about contributing factors.)

Among previous IA recipients, the CSC group was appreciably more likely to have been employed for at least six months than were the non-CSC IA individuals. The results are not statistically significant, but 50 percent of the CSC IAs reported this duration of employment compared with 39 percent of the IAs. This speaks to the persistent finding that CSC participation seems particularly efficacious for the IA client, though it has benefits for others as well (including, as discussed earlier, employees and employers).

3. Occupational Distribution

For respondents who were previously receiving EI benefits, almost two-thirds of the employment for CSC participants was concentrated in three sectors: Sales and Service-related occupations (26 percent), Business Finance and Administrative-related occupations (21 percent) and Trades, Transport and Equipment Operation-related occupations (18 percent). For comparison group respondents, the largest proportions of jobs were found in Trades, Transport and Equipment Operation-related occupations (24 percent), Occupations Unique to Primary Industry (22 percent) and Sales and Service-related occupations (19 percent). There is thus an indication that CSC participants are being prepared for white-collar work. Given that so many of the CSCs are in communities

that are very reliant on primary industry and related sectors, this may reflect a longer term advantage for CSC EI participants, in that more of them are finding work in "transportable" occupations that also may have greater opportunities for advancement in skill levels in the long run.

For respondents who were previously receiving IA benefits, the biggest concentrations of jobs for both CSC and comparison group respondents were in Sales and Service-related occupations (44 percent and 42 percent , respectively).

4. National Occupation Classification (NOC) Skill Level[15]

There are no significant differences in NOC Skill Levels for respondents employed at the time of the follow-up interview. This is true when comparing CSC participants with those from the comparison group for both previous EI and IA recipients.

5. Employment Status

A majority of the jobs held by both EI and IA respondents at the time of the interview were full time. There are no significant differences between EI/IA CSC and comparison group respondents in terms of the proportions having full- or part-time work.

Summary Comments on the Results of the Meta-analysis

The findings from the meta-analysis are interesting but are not conclusive as to the impact of the CSC experience on participants. There is a sense that training in and of itself is a benefit, whether or not a person participates in CSC programming, and that the CSC training is particularly effective in advancing the employability of the IA recipient — in terms of both finding and retaining employment.

d. What the Focus Groups with Current Participants Tell Us About Whether CSC Training and Related Services Increased Competitiveness in the Labour Market

As part of the site visits to 12 CSCs where current participants were available, focus group discussions were held to enlarge upon our first-hand knowledge about their training experience with the CSCs. Where possible, the participants were to be drawn from more than one program or service. After accounting for scheduling constraints and client availability, we were able to hold focus group discussions involving 74 individuals from 9 of the 12 on-site visits to CSCs.

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15 The National Occupation Classification (NOC) Matrix is formed by 9 classifications of occupation types and 4 skill levels for those occupations (as well as a separate Management Occupations category). NOC Skill Level A includes all professional-type occupations such as judges, doctors, teachers, university professors and engineers. NOC Skill Level B includes technical and skilled occupations such as medical technologists and technicians, computer programmers, social services workers, tradespeople and some supervisory positions. NOC Skill Level C includes clerical and intermediate occupations such as couriers, delivery truck drivers, retail salespeople, loggers, fishers and most factory machine operators. NOC Skill Level D includes elemental occupations such as janitorial staff, construction labourers, agricultural field workers and factory labourers.

The focus groups were typically held around the board room table at the CSC. While a structured approach was used to guide the discussion, the environment was relaxed and interaction was encouraged. The size of the groups ranged from 1 to 25 people. With the exception of two larger groups, the average size was 4 people. The topics covered the training taken, how participants came to be aware of the course, their expectations, the strengths of the CSC service, and any problems encountered. Most of the participants were still taking training, so few were able to describe how the course or service would affect their competitiveness in the local labour market. The remainder of this section presents what we were able to learn from the focus group discussions.

The participants as a group were enrolled in a broad range of programming currently offered by the CSCs. This included basic educational and skills upgrading, advanced technology, business and related skills, job readiness and career preparation.

The expectations of participants coming into the training or services that they took from the CSC tended to reflect the training or service mix. The range included:

- Upgrade management skill base;
- Develop technical expertise that complements their practical experience in the field;
- Develop some basic business skills that may be used in establishing a new business or working in a small business;
- Develop a computer specialty or take vocational training required for a desired occupation;
- Develop basic computer skills that are useful at work or as a baseline entry requirement for many jobs;
- Develop a basic understanding of the Internet so it can be used in job search activities;
- Upgrade education to the high school level as a prerequisite for job applications, for entry to a college program, or for entry to technical training.

While some participants were clearly taking the training or service at the CSC solely out of personal interest, most were upgrading their skill sets with the intent of finding a job or eventually moving to a preferred occupation. As such, for most of these respondents, the training or services was related to an employment objective.

Clear data on the degree to which their expectations were being met by the CSC were not available for all of the focus group participants. However, approximately 90 percent of those who commented indicated that their expectations were being met so far. Those whose expectations were only partly met expressed concern about a lack of accreditation that may affect their entrance to a follow-up program provided outside the CSC.

Despite the fact that many of the participants were still in their training program or using the CSC service, the following comments suggest that the experience has had a positive impact on some of the participants.

— *I have been able to apply what I learned in the course to my work.*

— *I have been able to do some trouble shooting with the computers at work.*
— *My English is improving.*
— *I have recently been volunteering as a tutor in the area of this course.*
— *I have been able to use the Internet to do a better job search.*
— *I have got a good résumé now and I have been out applying for jobs.*
— *I am more interested in learning. I want to take the tougher courses (sciences) and get good marks.*

The focus group participants were asked what they viewed as the strengths of the CSC. The most commonly mentioned aspects were:

- Friendly, helpful staff;
- Flexible hours; responsiveness to client schedules; client orientation;
- High quality instructors; adult learning environment; small classes; opportunity for one-on-one assistance; practical course material;
- Access to computers; self-paced computer-based learning ("means you can move at your own speed");
- Access to a career counsellor; assistance in getting work experience.

In sum, the focus group participants described a very positive and useful experience in their participation in CSC training.

Summary of Findings for Achieving Objective 3

The CSCs can be seen as meeting this objective to a considerable degree. Though it is asking rather too much of any one program or of an individual CSC to increase "global" competitiveness of industry, the employers who have utilized CSC training services speak very highly of the value of the training for increasing the skill levels of their employee base. Employers lauded the CSCs with whom they worked for the pro-active, highly responsive, and very timely manner in which management and staff helped the employer identify their training needs and then found innovative ways of meeting them. The employers often reported trying to have these needs met in other ways, with other service providers, but it was not until the CSC entered the scene that there was this positive outcome.

Employees surveyed also were very positive about the training they received and the manner in which CSC staff interacted with them. Employees felt their skills were enhanced and they also reported a more positive sense of self-confidence and a stronger valuation of training as something to include in their future.

The CSCs rely most heavily on the use of computer-based technology for the training they deliver, and the range of training content is impressive. The technology is adapted to the needs of the consumer, whether employer, employee or other individual. There are at least two CSCs that have developed a mobile unit for computer-based training delivery, and several CSCs have established worksite training facilities for employers. Increasingly, CSCs are purchasing Internet-based software and providing it as a training opportunity for in-home use.

All of these activities indicate pro-active and creative use by the CSCs of electronic technology to advance training in their communities.

Objective 4

To achieve financial independence from government funding of operational costs by generating revenue and leveraging private sector funds; creating partnerships and collaborating with the community; and administering funds responsibly.

This objective should be considered in terms of three features — its history in the development of the CSC/SI, its implementation by the CSCs, and the likelihood of achievement. In reality, each of these features has shaped the other.

First, it may be of use to look at the history of the development of this Objective. The key respondents at the program-wide, senior government levels were very helpful in placing this in the larger policy context. Several of these respondents, both federal and provincial, noted that the CSC/SI was conceived as a means for each community to develop its own response to strengthening its socio-economic situation through carefully targeted, brokered, community- controlled training programming. The policy for program development was explicitly and deliberately *not* to have a "cookie-cutter" or "top-down" approach, but to recognize that communities have distinctive needs and could and should develop their own distinctive means of meeting these needs. Although communities did indeed have considerable say in how their own CSC would be structured and what their financial needs would be, there was a sense from a few key respondents at senior levels that there was still an aura of communities having to fit themselves more within a pre-existing framework than had been hoped for.

In relation to financial independence, *per se*, one of the senior government respondents described the assumptions that underlay the CSC/SI from the beginning:

It was always expected that they would become independent, self-financed and community-owned. That was the original goal. They could go for government contracts, but there would be no base operational funding [after the SI ended]. They would be independent training deliverers, just another one of the 1,400 private post-secondary institutions . . . and they were to broker, not deliver, services. That was a central plank from the beginning, to minimize jealousy of the public system, because the CSC would be brokering, not delivering.

The implications of this requirement — financial independence without exception — quickly became clear. As another senior key respondent stated:

It's nice for communities to have CSCs, but in smaller communities they can't generate the $250-$300 thousand a year it would take to cover their operational budget. If you broker, you need to do $2.5 to $3 million of contracts a year — and they can't. If they did more direct delivery they could get bigger profit margins, but it still wouldn't be enough.

Another of these program-wide respondents elaborated upon this, in terms of measurement of objectives achievement:

> *[The degree of meeting this objective] is very uneven. Perhaps there should be some way of developing an adjusted measure of self-sufficiency, taking into account local conditions . . . If there is one standard of self-sufficiency across the board, this wouldn't work, because communities are different. This is a design flaw, this idea of treating them all as equals, because their situations are different.*

This respondent continued:

> *Another problem is asking that CSCs act in a non-competitive manner, which is untenable in certain communities, as we can see from some of the training plans, and it has come up at the annual general meetings, too.*

These policy and planning-based impediments to achievement of this objective may have become apparent over time, but this is not to say that the CSCs have not tried to overcome them as they implemented their own day-to-day plans and operations.

In fact, all CSCs actively engage in revenue generation, though they vary considerably on two fronts — the degree to which they support the idea that much of their programming should be delivered on a cost-recovery basis, and the degree to which their local situation allows them to engage in these activities.

First, all CSCs have over time come to accept that they must generate at least some revenue. Their operational funding is reduced 20 percent each year and thus it becomes very evident that they must act to generate funds.[16] However, to do so may well mean that they have to respond less to the needs of the more economically and socially vulnerable in order to provide programming for organizations, employers, or individuals, who are in a stronger position to pay (or have their training paid for). This approach runs strongly counter to the philosophy of a few of the CSCs, and it is a somewhat uncomfortable situation for many of the others, who are committed to the idea that they are both a "public" service as well as a "private" or "entrepreneurial" organization. They want to generate as much revenue as possible, but they do not want to have to turn away those who cannot pay or who cannot be sponsored in some way.

These CSCs that are in the middle of the financial independence spectrum, on both philosophical and practical implementation levels, have worked out many innovative ways of trying to develop a mix of training resources and related services. The program description at the beginning of the Findings section, and the individual CSC grids in the Technical Report bear striking witness to this. But, they are not financially independent now and do not see that as likely in the long term either.

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16 Those CSCs that have been operational for less than the five years will continue to receive from the province the declining proportion of funding for a total of five years, even though the SI itself has ended.

At the other end of the financial independence spectrum, there are perhaps three CSCs that are entirely committed to complete revenue generation. They do not consider providing programming that is not cost-recovery or profit-generating. They tend to serve employers, in either private or not-for-profit sectors. However, they also may serve non-fee-paying clients, if these clients are sponsored through a government program with which the CSC has a service contract. This would include providing a range of services for the federal government (EI clients) or the province (IA clients).

These three CSCs are, or will shortly be, independent of government funding for operational purposes. However, it is essential to note that these CSCs are located in communities with either a fairly vibrant mixed economy or with a strong industry presence that has turned to the CSC as its *de facto* training arm. (However, see immediately above for situations where they may provide services to individuals who are sponsored through government benefits programming.)

Finally, what is the likelihood that the CSCs can achieve this objective? In our interviews, management and staff tended to be more optimistic than their Boards, and the Boards tended to be divided on the possibility of doing so. We would say that fully three-quarters of the CSCs do not believe that they can become financially independent of government funding for operational costs. This is not because they haven't tried, or that they are not continuing to try. Rather, the simple arithmetic of what they would have to generate in contracts to meet their current operational cost levels doesn't compute, as it were. The CSCs were mostly placed in economically vulnerable communities and, if anything, the situation for these communities has worsened over the last five years, often dramatically.

As we noted earlier in quoting a key respondent about the economic, legislative and policy context that existed when the CSC/SI was being developed, there has been a major shift between federal and provincial levels in their respective responsibilities for training and funding of it. There also has been a substantial erosion of sheer amounts of funding — both at direct government levels and at the public sector agency level.

One of the elements of uncertainty for CSCs in terms of financial independence is the potential impact of the Training Accord on their ability to generate revenue. The Accord is not yet implemented, so this uncertainty is not yet resolved.

Thus, even though CSCs as a whole have enhanced their entrepreneurial skills and are generally very receptive to maximizing their revenue generation capacity, that capacity is seen as too limited by external circumstances for all but a very few to begin to approach the achievement of Objective 4. Most CSCs feel that they could continue on a more modest scale perhaps, if they were to have 30 percent of their operational costs provided by government. Some have already begun to downsize and some are working on further partnerships with colleges, School Districts, and other community stakeholders to rationalize their combined training efforts.

But the CSCs, and we as evaluators, agree that achieving financial independence is not a likelihood for the substantial majority of CSCs. We would put the maximum figure at three for those that could do so. While several have put aside enough money to continue for at least three more years in a fashion similar to their present one, they still do not envision ultimate financial independence for operational funds.

A Note on Trends in Revenue Outside of the Core Funding Formula

As part of our analysis of the financial context in which CSCs have been operating, we were able to draw on data provided to us by one of the funding partners on the sources and amounts of contract-generated income that 17 of the CSCs had taken in over the last three years. This is separate from the core funding that they have received, which declines by a set 20 percent each of five years of operation. We have analyzed these data further, to put into clearer focus the fact that the overall amount of government-based funding available for contracting has indeed diminished over the last several years. While CSCs have worked to compensate for this by finding other contracting sources, the constraints put on their ability to become financially independent are, as we have said, increasing. The full report of our additional analysis is found in the Technical Report and the highlights are presented below.

The available data provide an indication of the relative composition of the revenues generated by each of the 17 CSCs from HRDC, Skills Development, FRBC, and other sources.

The revenue data indicate that, on the whole, the CSCs are generating 85 percent of their contracted (non-core) revenues from HRDC and other revenue sources. Taken together, the CSCs are expected to provide programs and services generating revenues for 1999-2000 of $3.6 million from HRDC, $1.3 million from Skills Development, and $200,000 from FRBC. This compares with $5.1 million from other revenue sources.

The data also indicate that the level of revenues being generated by the CSCs from HRDC, Skills Development and FRBC is decreasing. Taken together, the revenues generated by the CSCs from these sources are:

- $6.7 million in 1997-1998;
- $6.1 million in 1998-1999;
- $5.2 million projected for 1999-2000.

In fact, the decrease was 9 percent between 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 and a further 15 percent decrease is expected between 1998-1999 and 1999-2000. Contracts from FRBC are no longer a significant source of revenue for any of the CSCs. However, it is worthy of note that in 1997-1998, FRBC did represent 37 percent and 54 percent of the revenues generated by CSCs in two heavily forest-reliant communities.

Summary of Findings for Achieving Objective 4

Only one CSC is largely financially independent, although it continues to utilize government funds (matching) funds for subsidizing some of its revenue-generating training. Perhaps two more CSCs have the potential to become permanently independent of government funding for operational costs. Fully three-quarters of the CSCs do not anticipate that they can achieve this objective, while most feel that if approximately 30 percent of their operating costs were government funded they could continue to operate, although on a more modest scale in some cases.

This objective highlights an inherent dilemma of the programming model for the CSCs, in that they are to strengthen economically vulnerable communities through bridging, brokering, etc., and yet are expected to generate sufficient revenue to become financially independent. Generally speaking, the CSCs that approach independence devote themselves virtually entirely to the development and delivery of services on a revenue-generation basis. The preponderance of those served are employers. However, if they do serve individuals who cannot themselves pay for service (i.e., those in IA, EI, etc.) the CSCs do so as part of a contract held with a ministry/department to provide services to the client group. Most of the CSCs still want to play a role in providing services to a range of target groups, including those who cannot support their own training or whose training may not be otherwise supported. This inevitably affects their ability to generate revenue.

The larger context of being located in small, rural communities, many of which are resource-reliant in a time of severe downturn, also substantially constrains the ability of CSCs to generate revenue, no matter how willing or able they are to do so.

The changes in government roles in relation to support of training and employment-related programming, and the uncertainties of the role of CSCs in relation to the (as yet unimplemented) provincial Training Accord also are inhibiting factors to development of revenue generating activities.

Thus, few CSCs have achieved this objective, but the impediments for the most part can be attributed to factors external to their individual operations.

4. *Initiative-wide Evaluative Conclusions: Addressing the Summative Evaluation Issues and Questions Presented in the Original Evaluation Framework*

So far we have focused on the degree to which the Community Skills Centres (CSCs) achieved each of the four objectives that were to guide their implementation processes and that set the expectations for programming outcomes. We have asked the questions — what did the *CSCs themselves* do and to what degree did they achieve what they had set out to do? We have given our evaluative assessment of the achievement of each of these objectives. But these evaluative assessments of the implementation processes and outcomes are essentially parts of the puzzle of success of the CSC/SI as a whole. We now have to ask — what has the *CSC/Strategic Initiatives (SI) as a program* done, how well has it done, and what directions should be taken for the future?

To do this, we return to the four evaluation issues that framed the evaluation research. They were articulated most explicitly in the evaluation framework presented in the RFP documents and elaborated upon in the Design Report prepared as part of the first Phase of the summative evaluation. These evaluation issues are common to all program evaluation, no matter what the specific program goals, processes or outcomes. They are the program's rationale, its impacts and effects, its objectives achievement, and alternatives for the future.

The evaluation framework was lengthy. For each of the main evaluative issues there were from five to nine evaluative questions, with many more sub-questions that were to be explored in the course of the evaluative research. (See Volume 2 for the evaluation framework chart.)

In this final Section of Volume 1 of the summative evaluation report, we would like to address each of the four issues by grouping the framework questions into their main themes and then answering them accordingly. We will start with the issue of impacts and effects, move to objectives achievement, then deal with program rationale, and close with alternatives. This seems to us to be the logical sequence to follow.

4.1 Evaluative Conclusions on Impacts and Effects of the CSC/SI as a Program

There are five themes arising from the multitude of questions and sub-questions that address this issue. We will list each and then provide our evaluative conclusion. These are:

1. *Whether the CSCs have met the labour market adjustment needs of the community through meeting the training needs of targeted groups within the community. "Targeted" includes business, industry, labour and individuals — specifically those on Employment Insurance (EI) or Income Assistance (IA).*

Neither the CSCs, nor any single agency can be expected to meet the range of labour market adjustment needs of a whole community. A further consideration in reaching to evaluative conclusions on this issue is that the very design of the CSC model was to place it in economically vulnerable communities, which by definition face daunting labour market adjustment challenges.

However, the CSC/SI as a whole has resulted in a great deal of systematic, innovative needs identification and in the development of very creative means of meeting training needs. As a group, they are very active in identifying target groups, whether these be displaced workers in a resource-based town, or the retail sector, or a high proportion of economically vulnerable residents. They also do a great deal to identify cost-recovery possibilities and to target those paying program users.

The findings on the CSCs success with EI or IA clients are not conclusive (in part due to limitations of data). However, it does appear that CSC participation increases employability to some degree. Much more clear-cut is the view from employers and employees surveyed that the CSC experience has had substantial positive outcomes. These include an increase in valuation of training itself on the part of employers and employees.

2. *Whether the CSCs used their technology to increase awareness of its value in the community for labour market adjustment purposes, including for training purposes.*

This is one of the most clear-cut of the impacts of the CSCs — they do indeed use their computer-based technology to its fullest capacity. This ranges from community awareness drop-in sessions on Internet use to provision of full-fledged interactive on-line courses.

The use of computer-based technology by the CSCs must be understood not only at the level of specific course offerings, but in *how they are offered.* That is, the CSCs build on the potential of the technology to create and support a variety of training environments. This includes creating very flexible scheduling (in one case, having the janitor open the building at 7:30 a.m. on a weekend so one person can come in before work); providing programs that the individual can use from a home computer; providing on-site computer labs for employers in some cases; and in two cases, developing a mobile computer-training unit. Thus, this is a uniformly positive impact of the CSCs' use of computer-based technology.

Their use of videoconferencing technology is much less extensive. Where it has been used it has been useful, but the impediments of line quality, hardware levels, expense, and the need for some kinds of training to be better adapted to the course content and audience are important factors limiting its use.

3. Whether the CSCs increased community control over decisions related to training.

The majority of CSCs play an important role in increasing community control over decisions related to training. This is especially so if one considers that the CSC Boards themselves are generally made up of community leaders in education, training, community development, business and industry. There are variations from community to community, and there is still room for improvement in Board effectiveness as a form of community-based decision making, but the CSCs undoubtedly add to the overall picture of community impact on training decisions.

In that a number of CSCs have formed, or become a part of, community consortiums or advisory groups that deal with broad issues of community economic development and/or rationalizing of training activities, they play an important role in increased community control as well.

It would be naïve to think that a single CSC and its partners could succeed in achieving complete community control over training decisions. They are not, after all, the only players in this complex scene. Some of the crucial players themselves are managed at a distance — from their regional headquarters or from provincial headquarters, Victoria or Vancouver. We often heard of local training stakeholders who wished to have more control of decisions in their own communities, but who could not because of the structure of their organization or ministry.

But, where it was structurally possible for partners to make decisions at a local level, and the CSCs had considerable freedom to do so, we believe that the CSCs played an important role in advancing the means for communities to control their own training environment.

4. Whether the CSCs increased the quality and availability of training opportunities in their communities.

First, as to increasing the availability of training opportunities in their communities, there can be no doubt that the CSCs do so. There may be some duplication of existing training, but even this is not an exact overlap, in that the CSCs typically add value either through increasing the availability of the training through extended hours of operation, or by basing the training on self-paced computer programming, or by adapting programming to meet the exact content needs of an individual client (whether an individual employer or organization, or a single individual or very small number of trainees).

An examination of the courses offered over the years shows a really impressive array of content topics that often did not exist anywhere in the area. They may not, in fact, have

existed before anywhere else. It is not uncommon for the CSCs to extend the reach of existing programming through moving it to a certification point; or moving it from theory, to practice, to formal certification (in one case contracting with local college staff to provide the certification-level training for the theory course that had been offered at the college). In another of the examples, two of the CSCs had arranged with a U.S.-based testing and accreditation group to provide and monitor tests for a hi-tech certification that was offered nowhere else in the region. Thus, graduates of the training (at the CSC or from any other resource) could take the certification test in town and not have to go to another province or the U.S. to do so.

Therefore, it is clear that the CSCs as a group increase the availability of training opportunities in their communities. As for quality of training, this is more difficult to assess. We do know that satisfaction levels reported by respondents — employers, employees, focus group members and community partners — are generally very high. We also know that when problems with quality are reported, the CSCs respond very quickly to overcome them. We think that the very fact that the CSCs operate in an environment where client satisfaction is a key to continued service use provides a decided impetus for providing high-quality services. Part of that quality is the manner in which clients are treated from the time they make their first call or drop in spontaneously. The reports of the quality of interpersonal interaction, and our own informal observation of it over the years, confirm that the staff are not only highly skilled in their interactions with clients but also deeply dedicated to creating a welcoming and effective training environment. This includes staff on contract from the private sector and partners who act as tors or mentors from School Districts or colleges.

5. Whether there were any unintended impacts or effects from the CSCs operations.

In addressing *unintended* impacts or effects, it is important to distinguish these from what was *intended.* The CSCs were intended to have a positive impact on communities and individuals in making labour market adjustments. The discussion of objectives achievement (see Section 3) and now of our conclusions on the evaluation issues deal with intended impacts and effects. But the reader will recall what we called the *latent* intention of making the colleges more aware of what could be done to be more responsive to business and industry (as this was expressed in the 1993 Premier's Summit). Are any impacts of the CSCs on the public post-secondary system intended or unintended?

Whether intended or not, we believe that the CSC Initiative as a whole increased the awareness of *all* training sectors of the importance of becoming more responsive to community needs *and* of developing means of working together to address these needs. We believe that, on one hand, the CSCs were a fresh voice in the discussion of how best to deal with the dramatically changing labour market — at both global and local levels. For issues like the importance of life-long learning, of just-in-time training, and of value-for-dollar in training, the CSCs definitely played a role in sharpening and focusing the discussion. In an increasingly competitive labour market, training can play a key role in the survival of an individual or organization.

On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the CSCs are regarded by some as actual or potential competition for scarce dollars. There is also an issue as to what sector in the range of training resources should have the predominant role in setting the training agenda and providing services. In this context, the CSCs act as a catalyst for other community training resources to look more carefully at what they are doing and how they can do it better. In our view, at the *local* level, the CSCs play a positive role in contributing to the public sector's own assessment of their current operations and how they would like to meet training needs in future.[17]

As noted in the evaluative findings section above, the majority of local public sector respondents, and here we speak of the colleges in particular, said that they saw from the CSC experience that there are several under-served target groups in their communities and that they can see how a CSC-type approach is a valuable one. They did not reflect the "just give us the money and we can do it" views that were more common in the formative evaluation stage. Rather, at the local level they seem to have moved to a position of having a wider view of community needs and a clearer recognition of what it would take to meet those needs. The impediments to their own training delivery in these circumstances were more to do with the structure of their own operations than with what the CSCs themselves were doing.

Another impact that may not have been anticipated has to do with the changing policy and legislative environment since the beginning of the development of the CSCs. All employment-and training-related programs, and all programs dealing with individuals on EI or IA, now are enveloped in the implementation of the Labour Market Development Agreement. This calls for co-management of social benefit and employment benefit programming. There is also devolution of funding and program delivery as an integral part of the Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA).

Just as we have found in other evaluations of employment and social service-related programming we have completed over the past year, the CSC/SI as a program has had an impact on the partner ministries at provincial and federal levels. At the local level, staff have met to identify programming needs and to work out mutually acceptable means of meeting them. The CSCs themselves may deliver LMDA-based contract programming for different ministries, as part of the new co-management process. Thus, they and their partners are in the process of learning more about working together within the new framework.

4.2 Evaluative Conclusions on Objectives Achievements of the CSC/SI as a Program

In the evaluation framework, the objectives addressed were, for the most part, those four that we have already discussed at length in the previous Section. The only additional

[17] We are not, of course, evaluating the public sector training resources. What we are reporting here is what we learned from respondents from this sector about the impacts they felt the CSCs had on their understanding of community needs and how these were being met — by themselves and/or the CSCs.

points raised in the framework questions are whether they were implemented as planned and whether there are standardized and appropriate data collection and reporting systems to allow monitoring for appropriate management decision making. We will return briefly to the four objectives and then turn to the other two points.

First, looking at the achievement of the four program objectives in aggregate, we would say that for three of the four objectives (1 ,2, and 3) the CSC as a program has made as much progress as could be expected for a new, complex model such as this. If we were to use one of our own scales of 4 to 1, with 4 being the most complete degree of achievement and 1 being not at all achieved, we would place the CSC/SI at a 3. We believe that a 4 is not possible because the CSCs were new players in a complex, often contentious field. They faced tremendous challenges in bringing the various stakeholders together, or in taking up their role in existing community efforts. They are guided by volunteer Boards that are invariably made up of very busy people, already deeply involved in community work. Some of that involvement is in organizations that could be in real or apparent competition with the CSC. Yet, the fact is that a substantial majority of CSCs have contributed to community collaboration on training issues. Also, it is clear that the majority of individuals and organizations have learned to work together more effectively with the catalyst of the CSCs. Both of these findings are firm indications of the CSCs achieving these objectives.

The CSCs have made excellent use of their technological base to support and enhance the training culture and training resources in their communities. However, they are already facing the problem of maintaining what was until recently a very up-to-date technology base and which now is rapidly losing its currency.

The objective that has not been met, for the most part, is that of financial independence. However, we believe that this objective contained an inherent dilemma from the beginning. It certainly is understandable that in today's context governments would set this as an objective. However, this objective is unattainable at an aggregate, program-wide level because of the circumstances in which the CSCs have been placed. By circumstances we mean both the location in economically vulnerable communities, and the "philosophical" contradiction that they are to be both a public service and a "virtual entrepreneur." These two poles of expectation are irreconcilable in the current programming model.

As for whether the CSCs were implemented as planned, it should be recognized first that the original vision was of 20 CSCs and, in fact, in less than five years 20 have been established. Some are recent, a few had a difficult start and had to be virtually re-constituted, and one or two have had to be re-modelled part way through their existence. Where difficulties arose, we believe that management from the government partners moved expeditiously to identify problems and work with the CSCs to take corrective action. However, the fact that 20 have become operational over this limited time period, in very different and often difficult circumstances, is a mark of achievement for all concerned.

Finally, in terms of standardized and appropriate data collection systems, it is our observation that this has improved greatly since the time of the formative evaluation. The CSCs were able to provide detailed program data for us as evaluators on quite short notice. The data are not necessarily kept in identical ways, nor reported in comparable formats, but the necessary content is definitely there, which could not have been said three years ago.

4.3 Evaluative Conclusions on Program Rationale

The issue addressed under program rationale is whether the program model being evaluated is an appropriate, effective and efficient means of meeting the overall program goals. In other words, given those goals, is there a strong enough rationale for continuing to use that programming approach instead of another model to meet the goals?

To come to a conclusion on this, a basic question to be asked is whether there is a continued need for programming. If that can be determined, then the issue of whether this is the optimal model to use can be dealt with.

As we see it, there are two primary aspects of training need that exist that are addressed by the CSC model. One aspect is the need for certain *means* or *process* of delivery and the other is the need for certain types of training *content*. The means of delivery includes for us the community-based, community-controlled mandate and structure of the CSCs. Their Boards are not advisory bodies; they are for the most part actively involved in setting the policies and practices of the CSCs. This makes the CSCs training needs identification and delivery responsive to the community.

The second aspect related to needs is that the CSCs deliver (or broker, facilitate, etc.) programming through a highly flexible, rapidly responsive process that is integrally connected to the learning environment they promote. The learning environment is "non-traditional." It varies widely in its specifics, but is characterized by:

- locations that are not tied to formal educational institutions, and that are centrally located and easily reached on foot or by public transportation;
- facilities that are informal but still "business-like" and that have supportive elements such as informal snack rooms, easy access to staff offices, independently accessible Internet stations, resources rooms, etc.;
- a highly interactive, personal quality of interaction between staff and trainees and among trainees;
- hours of operation that are broad and flexible;
- a very accessible staff that is pro-active and increasingly skilful in working with community partners to identify programming needs and respond in a just-in-time, efficient and effective manner;
- programming that can be precisely tailored to fit specialized training needs of even very small numbers of clientele.

These characteristics are relevant for considering whether the CSC meets a distinctive and on-going need. All the findings point to the fact that these characteristics contribute significantly to the use of CSC programming by a wide range of consumers who would not otherwise have done so. The scope of our research did not allow us to identify and interview *non-users* of CSC programming. However, the number and range of employers, employees, EI and IA, and non-sponsored clients with whom we did speak are strong evidence that a substantial gap in training provision is now met through the distinctive approach of the CSCs. Whether it is a large or small business that needs immediate help to keep business going, a shift worker who has to fit in a very few hours of training on a Saturday morning, a displaced logger who would not dream of going back into a school building, or a homemaker who feels she has lost touch with her skills from 10 years ago — they all have needs that the *means of operation* of the training resources in their community were not meeting. For these consumers, the CSC does — and for many it is the only source that has been able to do so.

Then there is the question of whether there is an ongoing need for the *content* of the training that the CSCs have facilitated. We are fully aware of the types of training that the private sector and public secondary and post-secondary institutions offer in the communities studied (and elsewhere as well). However, the overall range of private and public sector training in the CSC communities, at least, is unmatched by the sheer diversity of content offered through the CSCs. Of course, some of the programming of many CSCs is done in partnership with the public sector, but these courses tend to be the more common academic or skills upgrading type that this sector had traditionally delivered to meet those training needs.

It must also be noted that a great deal of the training that CSCs "directly" deliver is done through contracts with existing, local private sector trainers (or public sector teachers operating as contractors in a few cases). But most often this is a special version of more traditionally formulated and delivered courses that the private sector trainer may deliver under other circumstances (e.g., a computer specialist under contract to a School District to deliver a twice-weekly night course for three months).

We cannot believe that the CSCs would be approached by the community for such diverse offerings, nor could they market the range of courses they generate based on their formal and informal needs identification, unless the *previously unmet* need was out there. Therefore, in our view, there is a definite need for the type of training the CSCs facilitate — a need for the *means* or *processes* the CSC employs and for the diversity of *content* they offer.

Furthermore, we believe that the CSCs operations are very efficient. They rely heavily on (unpaid) needs identification, networking, and governance from their volunteer boards. They may have a staff of 2 or 18, but they are generally very economical in their approach to human resource management and to facility use. Most staff are on contract, the facilities are not luxurious, and the overheads are monitored carefully.

In sum, there is considerable justification for a CSC-type model. However, a logical rationale and an effective means of operation do not necessarily add up to a case for continuation of that program. The policy and funding environment in which it operates ultimately will determine its future. Its rationale is only one aspect of that decision-making process.

With that in mind, we must turn to our final evaluation issue, alternatives for the future.

4.4 Evaluative Conclusions on Alternatives/Directions for the Future

The CSCs were an experiment, a pilot, a test. They were created at what is already a very different time, in terms of the policy, legislative and financial context. They addressed needs identified at their inception (at the Premier's Summit, and from federal perspectives), and in the process of meeting these needs others were identified and met to a considerable degree.

But since the CSCs were expected to become less reliant on government for operational support from the moment of their inception, the evaluative issue is not *only* what should become of the CSCs as such, but also *what would be the role of government in helping to meet those identified needs in the future*. It might be that CSCs would be one way that government tries to meet these needs, but this need not be so.

The evaluative framework listed several questions under Alternatives. These included what strategies contributed to objectives achievement, whether there are on going needs for programming, whether existing structures were appropriate for meeting objectives in future, and whether the Consortium was of value for the CSCs.

We have already shown that there is a need for the *functions* that the CSCs perform and that the structure and operations of the CSCs are generally effective in meeting the program objectives. The Consortium has been of some assistance in purchasing equipment, in keeping CSCs in touch with each other, and in developing unified positions on policy issues (such as the response to the Policy Review Committee).

Given these evaluative findings, there is considerable justification for a CSC-type model. The recommendations provided under separate cover to the Evaluation Steering Committee address the issue of directions for future programming.

It is the hope of the evaluation research team that the findings contained within this report will be of use to the Evaluation Steering Committee as they continue their work in supporting communities and individuals adjusting to the rapidly changing economy and its labour market.